# BREAKING GROUND

## HOMES FOR CORK CITY, 1958-1982

TADGH QUILL-MANLEY

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ISBN: 2370001803657
First Published in 2026

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**This text was a hobby project by a college student.*

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# *BREAKING GROUND*

## INTRODUCTION

Cork City following the mid-twentieth century was a place of stark contradictions. From the outside, the southern capital presented a face of sturdy Victorian industry and deep-rooted mercantile pride, its streets climbing steeply from the River Lee in a tangle of Georgian terraces, shopfronts, and church spires. However, behind that respectable façade lay a hidden city of chronic overcrowding, slum tenements, and families doubled and tripled up in housing that had been condemned by every medical officer and sanitary inspector who had ever ventured into its dark stairwells. The crisis was not new - working-class Cork had endured cramped and often wretched conditions since the nineteenth century - but by the late 1950s, the pressure to act had become unbearable. The old approach of piecemeal repairs and reluctant interventions was no longer sufficient, and a new generation of officials, city councillors, and ministers began to contemplate a more radical response: nothing less than the wholesale reconstruction of the city's housing stock and, with it, the reshaping of urban life itself.

This text, titled '*Breaking Ground: Homes in Cork City, 1958-1982*,' tells the story of that transformation. It covers a period from 1958 to 1982, a quarter-century in which Cork Corporation, working alongside central government, private contractors, and a growing array of voluntary organisations, embarked on the most ambitious house-building programme in the city's history. The narrative that unfolds across these pages is not one of unbroken triumph, nor is it a simple morality tale of bureaucratic villains and heroic tenants. Rather, it is a story of persistent effort, recurrent frustration, genuine achievement, and, at times, profound failure. It is about the idealism of planners who imagined modern estates as places of light and community, and about the grim realities of damp walls, frozen pipes, and housing schemes that came to be seen not as solutions but as new problems in their own right. It is about political calculation and administrative procedure, but it is also about the daily struggles of ordinary people - young couples starting out, elderly women shivering in bedsits, Traveller families camped on refuse-strewn

patches of ground, and children growing up in caravans or on the upper floors of flats where rats ran through the ceilings at night.

This specific manuscript draws extensively on contemporary newspaper reports, particularly the '*Evening Echo*' and the '*Cork Examiner*,' as well as on the minutes and records of Cork Corporation itself. This reliance on journalistic and official sources gives the account a particular texture: it is a history from the inside looking out, shaped by the voices of councillors, city managers, architects, engineers, and the occasional dissenting clergyman or union representative. Tenants speak too, but often only when their grievances spilled over into strikes, protests, or petitions. That imbalance is perhaps inevitable, but it also reflects a deeper truth about the period - that housing policy was something done to working-class communities, not something shaped in partnership with them. The rebellions that did occur, from the five-week rent strike of the mid-1960s to the sustained protests at the National Building Agency estates a decade later, were the exceptions that proved the rule: most families endured what they were given, made the best of it, and waited their turn on the seemingly endless housing list.

The chronological sweep of the manuscript is broken into two main sections. The first, covering the years from 1958 to 1969, traces the surge in house-building that began under the stewardship of city managers like Walter MacEvilly and the political leadership of figures such as Lord Mayors Jane Dowdall, Seán Casey, and others. This was a period of rising ambition and, initially, of rising output. By the early 1960s, Cork Corporation was building hundreds of new homes each year, clearing inner-city slums and relocating families to sprawling new estates on the suburban fringe: Mayfield, Togher, Spangle Hill (soon to be rebranded Farranree), and Churchfield. Yet even as the numbers climbed, so too did the waiting lists. The more the Corporation built, the more families seemed to materialise, doubled up in condemned properties, living in sheds and outhouses, or returning from England to find no home waiting for them. Labour shortages, particularly of masons and plasterers, slowed progress to a

crawl at times. Disputes with the Electricity Supply Board over metering and disconnections revealed the often fractious relationship between the Corporation and other public bodies. And always, hanging over everything, was the question of money: loans that might or might not be approved, interest rates that crept ever upward, and the grim arithmetic of how much housing the city could actually afford.

The second section, covering 1970 to 1982, charts the development of housing policy into something more complex and contested. The National Building Agency, established by central government to accelerate construction through industrialised and system-building methods, became a central player - and, in the eyes of many tenants, a central villain. The estates it built in Togher, Mayfield, and the Glen became notorious for condensation, structural defects, and heating systems that left elderly residents shivering through winter afternoons. Rent strikes, protest meetings, and bitter exchanges between councillors and officials filled the pages of the local press. Yet this period also saw genuine innovation: the SHARE movement, founded by schoolboys, built homes for the elderly that shamed the state with their quality and compassion. The tenant purchase scheme, launched in 1971, allowed thousands of municipal tenants to become homeowners for the first time. And major new developments at Knocknaheeny, Hollyhill, and Mahon incorporated community facilities, industrial zones, and the Radburn planning principle, representing a more integrated and thoughtful approach to urban design than anything attempted in the 1960s.

Throughout both periods, certain themes recur with a kind of weary regularity. The relationship between Cork Corporation and the Department of Local Government in Dublin was perpetually strained, with local officials complaining of delays, second-guessing, and a lack of understanding of the city's particular circumstances. Land acquisition remained a slow and torturous process, hampered by appeals, inquiries, and the reluctance of landowners to sell. The chronic shortage of skilled tradesmen, forever threatening to derail

building programmes, seemed immune to any solution, whether appeals for emigrants to return or efforts to expand apprenticeship schemes. And the question of who should pay - the tenant, the ratepayer, or the central exchequer - was never satisfactorily resolved, leading to periodic crises in which the whole housing programme seemed to teeter on the edge of financial collapse.

But the manuscript also reveals moments of genuine progress, sometimes in unexpected places. The gradual, contested, and deeply controversial decision to begin housing Traveller families in conventional dwellings, taken against significant political opposition, marked a small but important step towards inclusion. The increasing attention given to the needs of elderly residents, with bed-sitters and one-bedroom flats incorporated into new schemes, reflected a growing recognition that housing policy had to serve more than just young families. And the emergence of the tenant purchase scheme, whatever its limitations, offered working-class Corkonians a stake in their communities that had previously been reserved for the better-off.

This manuscript, titled '*Breaking Ground: Homes in Cork City, 1958-1982*,' does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of housing in Cork City during these years. It is, rather, a chronicle of debates, decisions, and disputes as they appeared in the public record. It captures the language and assumptions of the time - the earnest talk of "differential rents" and "economic rents," the bureaucratic euphemisms of "clearance areas" and "unfit dwellings," the casual prejudices that sometimes surfaced in debates about Travellers and "problem families." But it also captures something more enduring: the stubborn belief, held by officials and tenants alike, that decent housing was not a luxury or a privilege but a fundamental right. That conviction, however imperfectly realised, drove the entire enterprise. It sustained the city managers who wrestled with budgets and loan applications, the councillors who faced angry constituents at public meetings, the architects who laboured over layouts and specifications, and the families who waited, sometimes for years, for a key that would open the door to a new life.

What follows, then, is a history of aspiration and limitation, of dreams deferred and sometimes fulfilled. It is a story rooted in one city but connected to larger currents: the post-war expansion of the welfare state, the transformation of Irish society from rural to urban, the struggle to reconcile social provision with economic reality. In the pages that follow, the reader will encounter the familiar landmarks of modern Cork City - Mayfield, Togher, Knocknaheeny, Mahon - and will see them not as settled suburbs, but as places in the making, raw and unfinished, shaped by the competing pressures of politics, finance, and human need. This is their story, and the story of the people who built them and lived in them.

# *BREAKING GROUND*

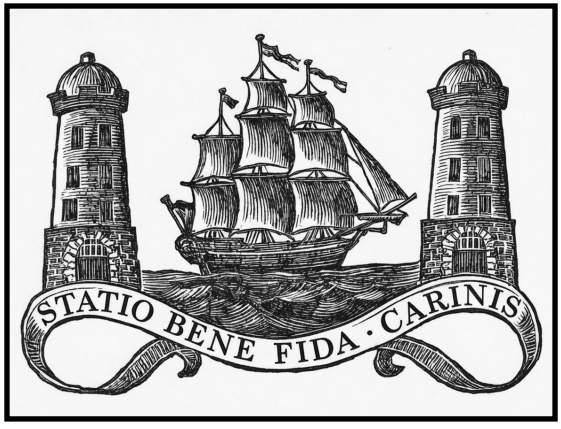
## *The Rt. Hon. Lord Mayors of Cork, 1958-1982*

| Year | Lord Mayor |
|---|---|
| 1958 | Richard Valentine Jago |
| 1959 | Sean MacCarthy |
| 1960 | Jane Dowdall |
| 1961 | Stephen D. Barrett |
| 1962 | Anthony Barry |
| 1963 | Sean Casey |
| 1964 | Sean MacCarthy |
| 1965 | Augustine A. Healy |
| 1966 | Cornelius Desmond |
| 1966 | Sean Casey (Died 29th April 1967) |
| 1967 | Sean MacCarthy |
| 1968 | Pearse Wyse |
| 1969 | John Bermingham |
| 1970 | Thomas Pearse Leahy |
| 1971 | Peter Barry |
| 1972 | Timothy J. O'Sullivan |
| 1973 | Sean O'Leary |
| 1974 | Patrick Kerrigan |
| 1975 | Pearse Wyse |
| 1976 | Augustine A. Healy |

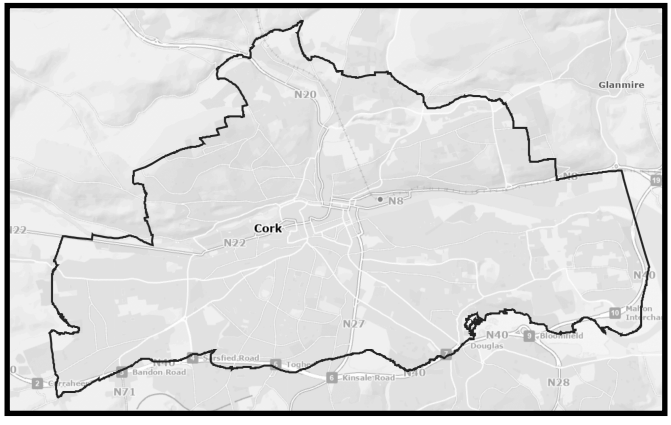
| | |
|---|---|
| 1977 | Sean French |
| 1978 | Gerald Y. Goldberg |
| 1979 | Brian C. Sloane |
| 1980 | James A. Corr |
| 1981 | Toddy O'Sullivan |
| 1982 | Paud Black |

*(Source: Cork City Council)*

*Mr. Walter MacEvilly, manager of the city council during much of this period.*
*(Source: RTÉ Archives)*




*A digitally remastered image of the City of Cork's coat of arms.*
*(Source [Original]: Cork City Council)*




*The previous, much smaller boundary of Cork City that existed from 1965-2019.*
*(Source: Cork City Council)*

# *BREAKING GROUND*

## A SURGE IN THE SIXTIES, 1958-1969

During the 1950s, Cork Corporation intensified its efforts to address the severe housing shortages, overcrowding, and slum conditions that had characterised much of the city's working-class housing stock since the early decades of the twentieth century. Like many Irish urban centres in the post-war era, Cork faced mounting pressure to replace dilapidated inner-city tenements with modern municipal housing while also accommodating a growing population and persistent demand for affordable homes. A central feature of the city Corporation's strategy was the development of large suburban housing schemes on the outskirts of the city. Among the projects under consideration was a proposed development of 140 houses at Closes, near the top of Fairhill on Cork's inner-city northside. In correspondence with the Corporation's General Purposes Committee, during June 1958 the Department of Local Government requested further layout plans before it could fully examine the proposal, reflecting the increasing involvement of central government in the oversight and approval of local authority housing schemes during the period. The proposed development formed part of a much wider five-year slum clearance and rehousing programme prepared by Cork Corporation. According to the Corporation's figures, the programme aimed to address the housing needs of 734 families displaced by planned demolitions and clearance schemes. This total included large numbers of vulnerable households, among them lone occupants and small families living in overcrowded or inadequate accommodation. A survey conducted by the City Medical Officer in late 1957 revealed that 881 families in Cork City were then living in overcrowded conditions, highlighting the scale of the city's housing crisis. To meet this demand, the Corporation outlined an ambitious building programme involving completed houses, ongoing construction projects, planned developments, and anticipated vacancies within the existing municipal housing stock. More than 1,500 housing opportunities were projected over the following five years through a combination of newly built homes, vacancies arising within Corporation estates, and future development

schemes in areas such as Knockfree, Connolly Road, and Casey's Cross. Municipal officials argued that these figures provided an "ample margin" to accommodate both slum clearance and overcrowding relief. Importantly, the City Medical Officer noted that many overcrowded families were living in houses that, although cramped, were structurally sound or capable of repair at reasonable cost. As a result, these dwellings would remain part of the city's stock of working-class housing and could continue to accommodate smaller households after larger families had been rehoused elsewhere.

The Corporation's plans reflected broader trends in Irish housing policy during the post-war period. Local authorities increasingly pursued comprehensive urban redevelopment strategies combining slum demolition with the construction of new suburban estates. These schemes sought not only to eliminate unsafe and overcrowded housing but also to reshape the social geography of cities by relocating working-class families from dense inner-city districts to newly planned estates on the urban periphery. At the same time, the article illustrated the cautious and highly regulated nature of housing expansion in 1950s Ireland. Large "perimeter" housing schemes outside the established urban core required detailed approval from the Department of Local Government, and the Corporation emphasised that its immediate rehousing programme could be achieved without relying on additional unapproved developments. This reflected ongoing concerns within government circles about balancing ambitious housing construction with financial limitations, planning controls, and the long-term management of municipal housing estates. The slum clearance and rehousing programmes of the 1950s would fundamentally reshape Cork over subsequent decades. Entire communities were gradually moved from overcrowded inner-city tenements into newly built suburban estates, laying the foundations for many of the city's modern residential districts while also transforming patterns of community life, employment, and urban identity.

At the meeting of the city Corporation's General Purposes Committee, detailed reports were regularly examined

concerning the costs of individual schemes. One such review focused on developments at Mayfield and the Pearse Road extension, reflecting the growing emphasis on financial oversight in municipal housing policy during the period. Presiding over the Corporation meeting, Lord Mayor R. V. Jago considered reports prepared by the City Architect using figures supplied by the City Engineer relating to the infrastructural expenditure required for these estates. The figures demonstrated the scale of investment necessary to support suburban expansion. At the Mayfield housing scheme, covering slightly more than eight acres, the cost of roads, sewers, and water services exceeded £13,000. Meanwhile, infrastructure costs at the Pearse Road extension varied depending on whether the work had been carried out directly by Corporation labour or through private contractors. The direct labour section of the scheme cost more than £10,000, while the larger contract-built section exceeded £28,000. These figures illustrated the increasingly complex nature of local authority housing projects during the mid-twentieth century. Municipal housing schemes required far more than the construction of dwellings alone; they involved the development of complete urban infrastructure networks capable of supporting growing suburban populations. Roads, drainage systems, and water connections represented a substantial proportion of total expenditure and were essential to transforming previously undeveloped land into functioning residential districts. The City Engineer's report also revealed how new developments were often linked to earlier phases of urban expansion. Certain sections of Pearse Road and Lower Friars' Walk had already been laid out as part of previous schemes, reducing the costs attributed to later developments. Similarly, portions of Columbille Avenue had been completed during earlier works associated with Mayfield. Such phased development was typical of Cork's suburban growth during the period, as the Corporation gradually extended infrastructure outward from the existing city boundary. Financial concerns were equally evident in discussions surrounding rents for municipal housing. A report from the Acting City Accountant calculated the "economic rent" for houses in the Mayfield scheme based on the total cost of construction, loan repayments, rates,

management expenses, and insurance. For the 86 houses in the development, the total cost of the scheme exceeded £153,000, while annual loan charges alone amounted to more than £9,000. When all associated costs were included, the weekly economic rent was calculated at £2 11s. 9d. per house.

Furthermore, at the meeting of Cork Corporation presided over by the Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor, R. V. Jago, city councillors approved a recommendation from the General Purposes Committee to reduce rents for the poorest tenants within the Corporation housing system. Under the proposal, tenants participating in the differential rents scheme whose weekly income did not exceed 40 shillings would receive a rent reduction of 1 shilling and 9 pence per week. The decision followed a report by the City Manager, P. Monahan, who outlined the financial limitations facing the Corporation. A total of £1,000 had been made available for rent relief, equivalent to approximately £20 per week. Officials examined various methods of distributing the available assistance among tenants. According to the City Manager's calculations, if the relief had been spread across all families earning less than 60 shillings per week, the reduction would have amounted to only eight pence weekly per household. However, by concentrating the assistance on the poorest tenants - 225 families with incomes below 40 shillings per week - the Corporation was able to provide a more substantial reduction.[1]

In the closing years of the 1950s, it is evident that access to housing and employment in Cork City became the subject of growing public concern, reflected in parliamentary exchanges between local representatives and government ministers. In March 1959, A. A. Healy and J. Galvin, both TDs for Fianna Fáil in the Cork area, jointly sought clarification from the Minister for Local Government following reports that he had been accused of offering excuses to justify delays in the housing programme within the Cork County Borough (Cork City). Responding to these

[1] *Evening Echo 11/6/1958*

allegations, Neil Blaney firmly rejected the claims, stating that they were entirely inconsistent with the factual record. He pointed to a marked increase in building activity over the preceding year as evidence of progress rather than obstruction. In the twelve months ending 31 January 1959, construction had commenced on 454 houses for Cork Corporation, a substantial rise compared with just 83 houses begun in the previous year. This expansion was reflected not only in construction starts but also in employment and overall output. The number of men engaged on the Corporation's housing schemes had grown significantly, rising from 366 in January 1958 to 488 a year later. At the same time, the volume of houses under construction increased from 401 to 551, representing the highest level of activity recorded by any local authority in the State at that time. Blaney addressed the suggestion that he had relied on "excuses" by referring to ongoing correspondence between his Department and Cork Corporation. This exchange, he explained, arose from detailed information gathered by local officials concerning housing demand, the prospects for slum clearance, and the availability of vacant municipal dwellings. The purpose of the Department's inquiries was not to delay progress but to establish an accurate understanding of the Corporation's position as it advanced towards meeting its housing needs. Taken together, these remarks formed part of a broader defence of government policy, emphasising measurable gains in construction and employment while underscoring the administrative processes required to plan and sustain large-scale housing development.[2]

As outlined by the '*Cork Examiner*' in October 1959, among those raising the issue was S. D. Barrett, a city councillor and TD who sought clarification on a series of developments affecting both workers and housing schemes under the authority of Cork Corporation. Barrett first drew attention to the situation at Casey's Cross, where men employed on direct labour housing schemes had recently been laid off. He further noted that additional reductions were expected among workers engaged on a second phase of the same scheme. In

[2] *Evening Echo 12/3/1959*

response, Seán MacEntee, speaking on behalf of the Minister for Local Government, acknowledged that employment on such schemes had indeed declined in recent months. However, he emphasised that staffing levels were determined by the housing authority itself, depending on the progress of individual projects. Turning to broader concerns about delays in housing development, Barrett highlighted the case of a proposed housing scheme at Ballymacthomas. Plans submitted by Cork Corporation, he pointed out, had remained under departmental review for more than four months before receiving approval. MacEntee confirmed the delay, explaining that it had arisen from efforts to refine the plans, achieve cost efficiencies, and improve their overall design. This process involved extensive correspondence and technical discussions between departmental officials and the Corporation. Despite the time taken, he maintained that the delay would not affect the scheduled commencement of construction, which the City Architect had set for September 1960. Barrett also raised the issue of land acquisition, arguing that delays in departmental decisions were hindering efforts to rehouse families in need. In particular, he referred to a public inquiry concerning land for the Togher Road housing scheme, the outcome of which had not been communicated more than four and a half months after the inquiry had concluded. MacEntee rejected the suggestion that the Department was obstructing rehousing efforts, stating that the inspector's report was still under consideration and that a decision would be issued as quickly as possible. A similar query was made regarding the Desmond Square scheme, where a public inquiry into land acquisition had taken place over six months previously. In this instance, MacEntee clarified that the matter had already been resolved: the relevant housing order had been formally confirmed on 3 October 1958, with official notification issued to the city Corporation shortly thereafter.[3]

At a meeting of Cork Corporation in March 1960, the Electricity Supply Board (E.S.B.) was strongly criticised by city councillors for its treatment of Corporation tenants,

[3] *Cork Examiner 24/10/1959*

particularly in relation to changes in electricity payment systems. Two weeks earlier, the city Corporation had been informed that tenants in the Spangle Hill area - who had been using electricity for lighting under a current-limited system at a fixed weekly charge of 2 shillings - were being transferred to a metered supply. Under the new arrangement, bills would be issued every two months. In response, the Corporation decided to seek clarification from the E.S.B. and to review the matter further at committee level. At the subsequent meeting, Councillor S. Allen reported that several Spangle Hill tenants had had their electricity supply disconnected by the E.S.B. on the previous Saturday. In a letter to the city Corporation, the E.S.B. explained that 1,220 premises in the Spangle Hill area had originally been supplied through current limiters. Over time, most residents had voluntarily converted to metered supplies in order to use electricity for a wider range of domestic purposes. A recent survey indicated that only 131 premises remained on the older system, many of them isolated, making collection of weekly payments uneconomical. The Board stated that these remaining consumers had been invited to adopt metered supply under the same terms as their neighbours, with all but 19 agreeing to the change. It expressed confidence that the remainder would also convert in due course. Under the existing system, unmetered consumers paid 16 shillings every two months for a restricted supply. By comparison, metered charges ranged from 9 to 12 shillings per two months, depending on house size, and allowed for the use of small household appliances. The E.S.B. added that it was willing to accommodate customers by accepting payments in weekly or instalment form over the billing period. Despite this explanation, several councillors remained critical. Councillor Allen described the Board’s letter as “plausible” but argued that tenants were effectively being coerced into accepting metered supply, despite their satisfaction with the existing weekly payment system. Councillor J. Bermingham went further, alleging heavy-handed tactics. He claimed that long-standing agreements - dating back more than two decades, when tenants had first switched from gas to electric lighting - had been disregarded. He also alleged that, in at least one instance, electricity had been disconnected from a house in

the absence of adult occupants. He argued that a state body should act with fairness and consult affected residents before taking such measures. Other councillors echoed these concerns. Alderman Reidy called for a more thorough investigation and accused the Board of unfair practices in disconnecting consumers. Alderman J. Galvin, T.D., noted that similar actions were now being reported in the Gurranabraher area. The issue highlighted tensions between the E.S.B.'s efforts to modernise its billing systems and the expectations of tenants accustomed to long-standing payment arrangements.[4]

At a meeting of Cork Corporation in May 1960, presided over by the Lord Mayor, Senator Mrs. J. Dowdall, a proposal to construct smaller and less elaborate houses at lower rents was put forward by Alderman J. Reidy. Alderman Reidy argued that such a policy would enable the Corporation to build a greater number of houses with available funds and accelerate the pace of construction. He maintained that smaller or terraced houses, offered at lower rents, would better meet the needs of working-class families, elderly residents, and newly married couples. He also criticised the existing rate of progress, likening it to a fixed wheel moving at a constant, unchanging speed. The proposal was seconded by Councillor R. V. Jago, who suggested that ministerial approval would be required to implement such a programme. He noted that the Corporation had long sought to build smaller houses and had only recently been permitted some flexibility in this regard. Councillor S. Allen also expressed support. However, the motion was met with significant opposition. Councillor D. P. Kelleher criticised Alderman Reidy for raising the issue after years of absence from housing meetings, arguing that he would otherwise have been aware of the Corporation's existing plans. He warned that altering the current programme - then providing for the construction of approximately 300 houses annually - would cause delays and risk lowering housing standards. He emphasised that the objective should be to eliminate slum conditions, not reproduce them in new developments.

[4] *Evening Echo 9/3/1960*

Senator A. Barry supported this position, arguing that it would be regressive to adopt lower standards reminiscent of earlier eras. He opposed increasing housing density and proposed that no action be taken on the motion. Other councillors echoed these concerns. Councillor L. Early rejected the suggestion that Corporation houses were excessively elaborate, noting that most were standard three-bedroom dwellings. Colonel J. Lucy dismissed the proposal as outdated, while Alderman S. Casey, T.D., argued that sufficient smaller houses already existed and cautioned against any implication that current housing standards were unnecessarily high. Further opposition came from Alderman J. Galvin, T.D., and Councillor J. Bermingham, who contended that the Corporation had significantly improved housing conditions in the city and suggested that such proposals might recur in the context of electoral politics. Councillor A. A. Healy, T.D., noted that similar proposals had been debated by previous Corporations and had been rejected by the Department. He stated that this refusal now appeared justified, as implementing such a scheme would likely place a greater financial burden on local ratepayers. Councillors J. Hickey and C. Desmond also opposed the motion, maintaining that existing housing standards were appropriate and beneficial. The City Manager, W. MacEvilly, observed that there was already a reasonable balance between different types of housing within current schemes. He noted that building densities varied across the city and pointed out that smaller houses did not necessarily result in significantly lower construction costs, citing recent examples where costs remained substantial. In closing, the Lord Mayor recalled that similar proposals had been examined in the past and found to be of limited value to the city’s housing programme. She emphasised the importance of maintaining and improving standards, arguing that working-class residents were entitled to high-quality housing. During the discussion, Councillor Jago requested comparative cost figures for different housing schemes but later withdrew his support for the motion when such data was not available at

the meeting. As a result, the motion lapsed without a vote, bringing the debate to a close.[5]

At a meeting in July 1961, Cork Corporation considered a motion proposed by Mr. W. Kennelly, requesting that Irish-based unions affiliated with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions examine the advisability of making a portion of their assets available to Cork and Dublin Corporations to help meet housing needs. Mr. Kennelly explained that the resolution aimed to alleviate the significant financial burden borne by local authorities through loan charges and bank borrowing for housing projects. He emphasised that, by providing such assistance, the unions would also contribute to reducing unemployment and stemming emigration. The motion was seconded by Alderman S. Allen. Alderman S. Casey, T.D., observed that similar proposals had been discussed repeatedly by the unions, noting that their assets were already invested in national securities. The resolution was carried unanimously. Mr. Kennelly also submitted a separate motion that, upon completion, the Ballymacthomas housing scheme be named the "James Allen Site" in honour of the late Alderman James Allen. This motion was referred to the Housing Committee for further consideration. In addition, Mr. Kennelly raised a recent tragedy at Gillabbey Rock, where a young girl fell forty feet to her death, and inquired what measures the Corporation could adopt to prevent such accidents in the future. It was agreed that a report be prepared by the City Engineer on the matter. The meeting was presided over by the Lord Mayor, Mr. A. Barry.[6]

A call was made by the Lord Mayor, Alderman. A. Barry, T.D., at a June 1962 meeting of Cork Corporation for Irish tradesmen working abroad to come to Cork City, where they would find ample employment. The city council meeting considered a recommendation from the Housing Committee that the relevant trade unions be notified of the shortage of plasterers affecting both the Corporation’s direct labour force

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[5] *Evening Echo 11/5/1960*

[6] *Evening Echo 12/7/1961*

and other housing schemes. The Lord Mayor pointed out that the city was experiencing a serious shortage of tradesmen, which was delaying the Corporation's housing projects. He stated that there was a secure and promising future in Cork for Irish tradesmen who were then working outside the country.[7]

In February 1963, it was reported that, in a mark of international recognition for the City of Cork's achievements in housing, the City Manager, Mr. Walter MacEvilly, was invited to attend a United Nations Conference on Housing in Wellington, New Zealand. The invitation, extended to housing experts from around the world, was promptly accepted by Mr. MacEvilly. At the city Corporation meeting preceding his departure, Mr. MacEvilly explained that the conference would address a wide range of housing issues and provided an invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas with international colleagues. He emphasised that the invitation was not a personal accolade, but rather a recognition of Cork's record in local authority housing. The Corporation welcomed the news with pride. Senator A. A. Healy remarked that the city should feel honoured that its City Manager had been singled out for such distinction. Alderman S. Barrett, T.D., highlighted that Mr. MacEvilly was the only representative from Ireland, and indeed from the British Isles, invited to the conference. Mr. Sean McCarthy, T.D., noted that Cork's reputation in housing had been established through visits by international delegations, while Mr. J. Hickey attributed the invitation to the City Manager's widely acknowledged competence. The Corporation also took the opportunity to schedule its Estimates Meeting for March 26, following Mr. MacEvilly's return from New Zealand, ensuring that the city's core business would continue uninterrupted.[8]

Cork Corporation recognised the importance of providing suitable housing for the city's older residents, and the

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[7] *Evening Echo 13/6/1962*

[8] *Evening Echo 13/2/1963*

Corporation's ongoing efforts were reported at a meeting in February 1964. Existing schemes at St. Finbarr's Avenue and Warren's Lane, comprising a total of 120 houses, include dedicated accommodation for the elderly. At St. Finbarr's Avenue, seven bed-sitters and thirteen one-bedroom-and-living-room dwellings have been allocated, while Warren's Lane provides eight bed-sitters and fourteen one-bedroom-and-living-room units. A new development at Templeacre was also set to include six bed-sitters and twelve one-bedroom-and-living-room dwellings, further expanding the city's provision for older citizens. In addition, smaller older houses, such as those at Horgan's, Ryan's, and Madden's Buildings, were reserved for elderly residents as vacancies arose, seeking to ensure that Cork City's older population had access to accommodation suited to their needs.[9]

In April 1964, the causes of delays in the progress of Cork Corporation's housing programme were discussed at a meeting of the city Corporation. A report from the City Architect and Town Planning Officer, Mr. E. O'Byrne, provided detailed information. For the year April 1963 to March 1964, it had been hoped to complete 297 houses, but only 200 were likely to be finished. The shortfall was due to the failure to complete 33 houses at Togher Road, 56 houses at Spangle Hill, and eight houses at Glen Ryan before 31 March 1964. In each case, the delays were attributed to shortages of masons, plasterers, or electricians. For the year April 1964 to March 1965, it was hoped that the following houses would be completed: 56 at Spangle Hill, 55 at Togher Road, 8 at Glen Ryan, 75 at Warren's Lane, 50 at Farrancleary, and 40 at Templeacre, giving a total of 284 houses. The report, previously presented to the Housing Committee, was formally adopted. A report by the City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, stated that the Joint Industrial Council for the building industry had refused permission for Saturday working at the Togher Road scheme during the five-day week, on the grounds that the works were not of an emergency nature. The Committee recommended that the Joint Council reconsider the application and allow Saturday

[9] *Evening Echo 12/2/1964*

working at least until the backlog was cleared, and that a decision be provided before the next Corporation meeting. Members also raised concerns about three houses on the Bandon Road, proposed for takeover and adjoining the Warren's Lane scheme, requesting their demolition and the rehousing of occupants as soon as possible. It was reported that a comparative output report between the Corporation's schemes and those of other local authorities was being prepared; overtime had been introduced at Warren's Lane, with work continuing until 7 p.m.; there had been a delay in the handover of nine houses at Spangle Hill, for which tenants had already been selected; and Glen Ryan had experienced delays in the delivery of sanitary goods. The city Corporation adopted several recommendations: future housing progress reports were to indicate the number of foremen employed by the direct labour unit and the commencement dates of each scheme; and applications were to be invited for the letting of private development sites at Mayfield as soon as possible. In response to questions, the City Architect noted that a report on the use of felt roofing in Corporation schemes was being prepared. A member suggested that all bedrooms should be upstairs and that sitting rooms be provided in all Corporation houses, and it was agreed that the City Architect would investigate the matter. Commenting on the broader situation, Mr. Con Connolly observed that the housing programme could not be completed using conventional methods due to a shortage of skilled labour. The report was formally adopted, and the meeting was presided over by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Senator A. A. Healy.[10]

At a luncheon meeting of the Publicity Club of Ireland at the Metropole Hotel in Cork City centre, Mr. Liam St. J. Devlin gave an overview of city development. Devlin stated that the expansion of the city had led to an increasing demand for housing. He explained that, as in other densely populated areas in the state, residential construction had begun shortly after the war and had continued steadily thereafter. Large housing estates had been developed across suburban districts.

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[10] *Evening Echo 15/4/1964*

Over the previous eight years, approximately 1,500 houses had been built by private enterprise, while about 2,400 had been constructed by the local authority, demonstrating what he described as a strong record by Cork Corporation. He noted that the schemes introduced to accelerate slum clearance had become exemplary projects, often showcased to visiting housing experts. Devlin also highlighted that, within the preceding year, the City Manager had been invited to represent Ireland at a United Nations seminar on housing management held in New Zealand. He pointed out that slum clearance had been a slow process, largely due to the time required for public inquiries and the legal procedures involved in the compulsory acquisition of condemned properties. To overcome these delays, the Corporation had acquired undeveloped land for housing schemes, which had later been incorporated into the city through extensions of the borough boundary. At that time, figures indicated that around 2,000 houses still remained to be built to complete the programme, with nearly 500 already under construction. Finally, Devlin rejected the notion, commonly heard outside Cork, that the city had experienced sudden, unplanned growth. He argued instead that, since the end of the Emergency, Cork Corporation officials had been actively planning for expansion and the extension of services, and that this process of planning had been ongoing.[11]

In May 1964, it was estimated that Cork Corporation would complete about 280 houses that year. This information was given to a meeting of the city Corporation in a report from the Housing Committee. Difficulties were, however, being experienced in regard to the acquisition of land for housing development and the retention of skilled labour. The report said that the Manager had stated that there were at that time available sites for only about 25 dwellings on the south side of the city and that any extensive building in that area would have to be carried out outside the borough boundary, within the area of jurisdiction of Cork County Council. The report stated that the Corporation had been in correspondence with the County Council since May of the previous year, seeking

[11] *Evening Echo 16/4/1964*

consent to the compulsory acquisition of sites for some 700 houses in the Deanrock and Togher areas. It added that even if the consent of the County Council were forthcoming immediately, it would not be possible to develop any of this land during that year owing to the slow process of land acquisition and development. The Manager, in his report, stated that a committee set up by the Government was investigating various aspects of building, including the possibility of departing from non-traditional methods of construction. The Corporation owned sites for about 80 dwellings in Grattan Street. The report further stated that the attention of the Manager had been directed to a site suitable for building in the eastern suburbs of the city, and recalled that the council Committee had adopted the following recommendations: (a) that the site at Closes South be used exclusively for Corporation houses; (b) that a report be submitted on the redevelopment for housing of vacant areas at the Marsh; and (c) that a report be submitted on the Corporation's proposals in regard to four houses at the Bandon Road end of Warren's Lane housing scheme. It was also stated that a member had suggested that the City Architect should consider building Corporation houses with flat roofs surrounded by railings, so that the roofs might be used as play areas for children.[12]

Cork Corporation, at a meeting during November 1964, adopted a recommendation from its Housing Committee approving a report from the City Architect and Town Planning Officer, Mr. E. O'Byrne, for the development of the Red Abbey area. It was stated that the provision of parking space for cars was not the primary purpose of the proposed clearance. The purpose, it was explained, was to create space and to open up a view of the historic Red Abbey and of South Presentation Convent. The site, however, would also provide suitable parking space. The City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, reported to the Housing Committee that for over two years the Corporation had been endeavouring to acquire the quarry on Ballyhooly Road under the Derelict Sites Act, 1961. Two owners had lodged appeals against the

[12] *Evening Echo 13/5/1964*

acquisition, and the Minister's decision was still awaited. It was stated that notices would then be served on the owners to abate a nuisance in the quarry and that legal proceedings would be taken against them if they failed to comply. Mr. J. Hickey called for a report from the Medical Officer on the matter. The Cork County Registrar wrote to the Housing Committee requesting the removal of the public convenience at the front of the Courthouse, stating that the "continued existence of this structure anywhere upon the Courthouse premises was without merit and objectionable in the extreme." The Committee recommended that no action be taken in the matter, and the city Corporation agreed with that view. The Lord Mayor, Senator A. A. Healy, presided.

It was also reported that Spangle Hill, the familiar name of one of Cork City's most populous housing estates on the north side of the city, was to be no more, and it was reported that in future it would be known as Farranree. The Housing Committee of Cork Corporation had before it at its meeting the result of a plebiscite held to determine whether the name should be changed. The City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, reported that of the 1,551 ratepayers in the area, 1,259 had voted in favour of the name being changed, 36 votes had been deemed invalid, and 72 ratepayers had voted against the proposal. The Committee agreed to recommend that, in accordance with the result of the plebiscite, the name Spangle Hill be changed to Farrarree. The recommendation was unanimously adopted. The City Manager also informed the Housing Committee that proposals for the naming of new roads in the Warren's Lane–St. Finbarr's Avenue area and in the Churchfield area would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.[13]

As reported by the '*Evening Echo*,' "there was an immediate need for houses for 1,194 families in Cork City," it was stated in a report by the City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, presented at a meeting of Cork Corporation held in December 1964. The meeting also heard that it had been estimated that 191 houses would be completed by the

[13] *Evening Echo 11/11/1964*

Corporation in 1964, compared with 223 completed in 1963. The details were contained in a report of the Housing Committee, which was adopted. The Manager's report provided a breakdown of the city's housing problem. Of the 1,194 houses required immediately, 695 were in the north of the city and 499 in the south. A total of 713 families were stated to be living in overcrowded or otherwise unsuitable conditions within the county borough. Of these, 206 families were living in slum clearance areas; 44 in accommodation subject to demolition or closing orders; 131 as sub-tenants in Corporation dwellings; and 100 in inadequate housing outside the borough boundary. It was estimated that 100 of the families concerned would make arrangements to build their own houses. Some 225 houses were reported to be under construction in the north of the city and 129 in the south, making a total of 354. Eight schemes were stated to be in progress for 760 houses in the south and 46 in the north, a total of 806. With regard to the proposed development in the Glen area, it was suggested that of the approximately 600 dwellings to be provided, 75 would be one-bedroomed, 200 two-bedroomed, 150 three-bedroomed, and 175 four-bedroomed. It was further suggested that two-thirds of the total be provided as houses and the remainder as flats of three or four storeys, with the possibility of one high-rise block. A number of houses were to be reserved for tenant purchase. The report also stated that two other sites acquired by the Corporation, but not yet suitable for building, would accommodate 192 houses. Four further sites under consideration for acquisition were said to have the potential to provide a further 743 houses. Among the points made in the report were that the position regarding re-housing had progressively improved in recent years, and that the Corporation was now re-housing persons with one or two children. It was also noted that when the Corporation had been building at the rate of 300 houses a year, these had been constructed on undeveloped land, whereas in recent years building had taken place on derelict sites. It was estimated that it took approximately five years from the date of commencement of land acquisition, to the completion of houses in such areas. It was further stated that there had been no undue delay on the part of the Department of Local

Government in dealing with the Corporation's housing schemes. The report noted that Cork County Council had consented to the making of loans under the Housing Acts by the Corporation within the county area, but had not yet consented to the acquisition of land by the Corporation in that area. The meeting also adopted a recommendation from the Housing Committee approving the scheme for the provision of approximately 600 dwellings in the Glen area, but providing that the number of two-bedroomed houses in the scheme be reduced. These matters came before the city Corporation in the report of the Housing Committee, which adjourned further consideration of the Manager's report to the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee.[14]

A lengthy debate on housing took place at City Hall, with the Lord Mayor, Mr. Con Desmond (Labour) presiding. In a discussion lasting approximately 90 minutes at a meeting held in October 1965, members of opposition parties called for a clear statement from the Department as to whether loans amounting to approximately three-quarters of a million pounds would be made available. The City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, told the meeting that commitments for building work in progress by the city Corporation amounted to £236,000 and that £0.5 million was required to provide loans to individuals building houses privately. He stated that he proposed to continue authorising such loans until it was officially made known that funds were not available. A report on the financing of the Corporation's capital programme, which was before the meeting, gave rise to doubts among some opposition members as to whether the Corporation would receive the loans. In his report, the City Manager stated that up to a few months previously, loans required to finance the Corporation's various capital works had been readily available, and it had been the practice to proceed with approved schemes even in advance of the completion of borrowing arrangements. He continued that, however, when sanctioning a scheme of 34 dwellings at Marieville, to be built by direct labour at an estimated cost of about £81,000, the Department of Local Government had drawn attention to

[14] *Evening Echo 9/12/1964*

the requirement that work on the scheme should not commence until approval for the loan had been obtained, whether from the Local Loans Fund or other sources. Accordingly, it had become necessary to review the position regarding borrowing for the housing programme. It had been intended that site development works on the Marieville scheme would commence within two months and that building work would begin within four months. If that schedule could not be maintained, it was stated that it might be necessary to reduce the number of men employed in the Corporation's direct labour organisation. Mr. S. Barrett, T.D. (Fine Gael), asked whether it was now a requirement that the Corporation could not begin a housing project before loan sanction had been obtained. It was noted that while such a condition had applied in times of capital shortage to schemes such as sanitary works, this was the first time it had applied to housing.

Mr. Barrett stated that £1 million had been available from the Local Loans Fund since 1956 and that the Minister for Finance had indicated that this money was available. He asked whether it would be forthcoming that year and whether this explained the delay in the £81,000 payment to the Corporation. The Manager replied that up to 1956 the Corporation's capital works had been financed through public stock flotation, but that the loan floated in that year had not been very successful, necessitating alternative arrangements. The Government had then provided for up to £1 million to be made available, if required, from the Local Loans Fund. This arrangement had continued for a time, after which sufficient capital had become available and the Corporation had applied for block loans at the beginning of each year. Mr. Barrett queried whether, having received sanction for the scheme from one section of the Custom House, it was unreasonable to expect that funding would be sanctioned by another. Mr. S. Casey (Labour) stated that it was time to speak plainly about the document before the meeting. He said that, in effect, it indicated that the Government did not at that time have sufficient funds to provide the city Corporation with loans for its housing programme. He added that the suggestion that the

Corporation should approach insurance companies for loans at higher rates of interest reinforced that view, and warned of possible job losses in the direct labour scheme and difficulties for private applicants seeking housing loans. Mr. Barrett stated that, while he did not know whether the Government had the funds, he objected to the absence of a clear statement, adding that it appeared unlikely that citizens would receive housing loans that year and that those who had entered into commitments might see their expectations disappointed. He described the Government's approach to housing as highly questionable. Mr. D. Cronin stated that a credit squeeze was being experienced both locally and in England, and cautioned against creating undue alarm. Mr. A. A. Healy, T.D. (Fianna Fáil), said he did not intend to engage in political argument, but observed that funds were clearly scarce. He suggested that the Corporation should first seek a definite answer from the Minister before criticising. Mr. W. Byrnes stated that the Minister had previously indicated that funds for housing were unlimited, and that this position should be clarified. Mr. P. Donovan remarked that there was nothing in the Manager's report to indicate that loans had been refused and suggested that discussion should be deferred pending a formal decision. Mr. J. Hickey stated that financial institutions effectively controlled credit, and that such control should rest with the Government. Mr. Seán McCarthy suggested that the Manager's report be forwarded to the Minister, outlining the anticipated difficulty regarding the £81,000 scheme and requesting that the necessary funds be made available during the current financial year.

Mr. A. Barry (Fine Gael) stated that the Minister would already be aware of the difficulties and warned that, regardless of the cause, the number of houses built would be significantly lower than in the previous year. Mr. P. Wyse (Fianna Fáil) rejected suggestions that there was cause for alarm and stated that the Government was capable of addressing the situation. He noted that the Committee had already requested funding from the Local Loans Fund. Mr. Barrett asked whether approximately £425,000 was required immediately for loans to private builders. The Manager had replied that, taking into account existing overspending and

available funds, approximately half a million pounds would be required for new loans. In response to further questions, the Manager stated that previously there had been no difficulty in obtaining the required loan amounts, and that the current issue had arisen from the new condition attached to the latest scheme. Mr. Casey asked when workers might begin to receive notice of potential redundancies. The Manager stated that unless work proceeded as scheduled, there was a possibility that staff reductions would be necessary within a few months. Mr. Healy observed that this was the first time in several years that such an issue had arisen and queried whether all available funds had been utilised in previous years. The Manager replied that the Corporation had only sought and received the amounts required.

Mr. Seán McCarthy remarked that housing output figures did not fully reflect current activity, as houses were planned several years in advance. Mr. C. Connolly proposed that the Lord Mayor and the Manager should contact the Minister immediately to outline the position. Mr. P. Donovan suggested that the £81,000 Marieville scheme be treated as a test case to determine whether funding would be forthcoming. Mr. Barrett asked for clarification of total requirements. The Manager stated that approximately half a million pounds would be required for housing loans to private builders up to the end of the financial year, while commitments for direct labour and contract work amounted to £236,000, with an additional £350,000 required if further schemes were to proceed. He added that the present situation had arisen because building societies and insurance companies had restricted lending, leading the Corporation to increase its own lending commitments. Mr. Barry asked what would happen if the Corporation could not meet its commitments. The Manager replied that applications already received would be treated as commitments. Mr. Barrett asked whether applicants would receive loans eventually if funds became available, to which the Manager replied in the affirmative. He added that he had previously been informed by the Minister that building operations should be advanced as much as possible, and that he had continued his policy on

that basis. Mr. Healy stated that there was no question of applicants ultimately being denied loans. The Lord Mayor brought the discussion to a close when it was unanimously agreed to adopt Mr. Connolly's proposal that the Lord Mayor and the Manager should contact the Minister to outline the position.[15]

The City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, told a meeting of Cork Corporation held in January 1966 that there had been no change in the position relating to the provision of loans for housing purposes. He stated that he was not in a position to inform applicants when the Corporation would be able to provide the money. He was replying to Alderman S. Casey, who said that when members had last discussed the matter they had been unanimous in their view that serious hardship was being caused to applicants. Mr. Casey said he was shocked to learn that applicants were being written to and that those who qualified for loans were being informed that the Corporation agreed in principle to grant a loan, but that they should not proceed with their plans pending an investigation into their financial position. "I would like to know exactly what the position is," Mr. Casey said, adding that since the previous meeting the Department appeared to be content with issuing standard letters of that nature. He stated that the Lord Mayor had undertaken to make representations to the Minister and to press the matter, but that in the meantime many people were being left in a difficult position, particularly those who had made arrangements for marriage and were now faced with uncertainty. Alderman S. Allen said that all members were concerned about the situation, although possibly for different reasons. He considered that the Corporation was fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to housing, but agreed that the Minister should set a clear deadline, as had been suggested. The City Manager said that there had been no change in the situation since the previous discussion. He stated that as of December 31 applicants had been approved for loans amounting to £163,000, but that he was unable to indicate when the funds would become available. Mr. E. P. Stanley

[15] *Evening Echo 13/10/1965*

described the situation as "deplorable," stating that the Corporation had received no indication from the Minister. Alderman Casey then asked whether the Corporation might again remind the Minister of what he described as the "unfortunate position," and, on the recommendation of the Lord Mayor, Mr. C. Desmond, it was agreed that this course of action be taken. Later in the meeting, the question of re-housing Corporation tenants was discussed. Mr. T. P. Leahy (Labour) said that the Minister should be urged to reconsider the position whereby a sub-tenant in a Corporation house was not eligible for a £600 grant when qualifying for a new house. Referring to cases where in-laws were living with parents, he pointed out that under the existing system such individuals were effectively encouraged to move into substandard housing, from which they might qualify for a new house after two years. He also suggested that the Manager consider allocating second-tenancy houses to such applicants, as the question of a Corporation grant would not arise in those cases. On the suggestion of Mr. Seán McCarthy, it was agreed that the matter be referred to the city council's Housing Committee for examination, including an assessment of the number of people affected.[16]

Members of Cork Corporation again engaged in a lengthy discussion on housing at their meeting held in April 1966, at which the Lord Mayor, Mr. C. Desmond, presided. What developed into a political exchange among members arose when Alderman S. D. Barrett, T.D., asked whether there had been any further communication from the Department of Local Government. The City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, stated that there had been no additional information from the Department, which had previously agreed to undertake, on behalf of the Corporation, the planning, design and construction of dwellings by system building in the Glen/ Assumption Road area. He added that information requested by the Minister regarding the scheme had been forwarded on September 23 of the previous year. A report of a meeting of the Housing Committee recommended that the Minister be asked, as a matter of urgency, to clarify the current position

[16] *Evening Echo 12/1/1966*

regarding the scheme. Alderman Barrett stated that the Minister should be pressed to deal with the matter immediately. He recalled that when the Minister had taken over the system building scheme in June of the previous year, it had been indicated that construction would commence within three months. However, no building work had taken place in the Glen/Assumption Road area. He added that, as a result of this delay, the Corporation's allocation for house building in the coming year had been reduced from £634,000, which was required, to £310,000, meaning that fewer than 100 houses would be built during the year. Mr. A. A. Healy, T.D., stated that the recommendation reached by the Housing Committee had been unanimous and expressed the view that all members would make every effort to secure a decision from the Minister. Alderman S. Casey, T.D., said that the matter should be raised with the Minister without delay. Mr. D. Cronin stated that no one was more anxious to see houses built than the Minister and said that, in fairness, he was doing his utmost under difficult financial circumstances. Mr. P. O'Donovan observed that in the previous year, when there had been no discussion of financial constraints, the Corporation had completed 175 houses. Mr. P. Wyse, T.D., said that discussions on housing were often unproductive and tended to become political, adding that Government expenditure on housing was higher than ever. The City Manager also informed members that a preliminary review of the allocation received had enabled the Corporation to process all applications for housing loans or grants up to the end of January. He added that a further review indicated that applications received up to the end of March could also be met, and possibly some received during the current month. However, later applications were being approved on the understanding that payment of loans or grants would not be made until the April–June quarter of 1967.[17]

At the suggestion of Alderman S. Casey, T.D., a meeting of Cork Corporation resolved that the housing problem should not be treated as a political "football" between rival parties

[17] *Evening Echo 27/4/1966*

seeking advantage over one another. It was accordingly agreed to defer discussion of the matter, including correspondence from both Ministers, until after the Presidential election. The Government had refused the Corporation additional funds for housing, stating that such provision was not possible due to the limited resources of the Exchequer. In a letter to the City Manager, Mr. Walter McEvilly, the Minister for Finance, Mr. J. Lynch, stated that the City of Cork's allocation compared favourably with that of many other major housing authorities. He further indicated that the proportion of total housing funds to be allocated to Cork was primarily a matter for the Minister for Local Government. The Corporation's full allocation, he noted, amounted to £920,000 - comprising £310,000 for its own housing programme and £610,000 for house purchase loans and supplementary grants - compared with total expenditures of approximately £840,000 in 1965/66 and £700,000 in 1964/65. In this respect, he reiterated, Cork's position was relatively advantageous. Referring to a specific case, the Minister acknowledged the Council's desire to proceed with the Glen/Assumption Road scheme, given its history, but stated that he was not in a position to offer assistance at that time. The project, however, remained under consideration by the Department of Local Government. Also, a further communication from the Minister for Local Government, Mr. Blaney, referred to prior correspondence concerning the provision of dwellings at various sites through industrialised or system building methods. He stated that the matter was under consideration and that a further letter would issue in due course. This correspondence was also scheduled for consideration by the Corporation. At the meeting, Alderman Casey, in proposing the deferral, stated that the Labour Party believed housing should not become a point of contention between political parties during the Presidential election, which, in his view, ought not to have been held. He suggested that discussion be postponed until after the election result was known. Mr. A. A. Healy, T.D., supported the proposal, describing it as sensible and arguing that postponement would not prejudice the Corporation's position, as the matter had already been extensively debated. Mr. C. Connolly observed that the issue had been discussed

repeatedly in recent meetings and remarked that members were aware that the desired funds were not available, cautioning against any false expectations. Mr. A. Barry, T.D., contended that the Minister's figures did not adequately account for the recent extension of the borough boundary, which had effectively doubled the city's area and increased its population by half. He argued that the figure of £700,000 for housing expenditure in 1964/65 should have been at least £1,050,000 to reflect these changes. He suggested that this discrepancy might form the basis of a case to be presented to the Government, noting that the Corporation had assumed responsibility for areas previously administered by the County Council. It was ultimately agreed to adjourn the matter to the next meeting of the Housing Committee, whose report would subsequently be brought before the full Council for public discussion. The meeting was presided over by the Lord Mayor, Mr. C. Desmond.[18]

In October 1966, the Cork City Executive of Fine Gael unanimously passed a resolution calling on the Minister for Local Government to honour his promise made to Cork Corporation in July 1965 that if a scheme of 600 houses was handed over to his department, large scale operations would commence within three months. The matter arose when Mr. Peter Barry asked about the housing position. Ald. S. D. Barrett, B.L., T.D., said that the Glen-Assumption Road housing scheme of 600 houses had been indefinitely postponed by the Minister for Local Government. Ald. Barrett said that on the opening day of the new Dáil session the Minister for Local Government had very bad news for people in need of housing in Cork City. He had informed the Dáil that his plans for supplementing the housing programme in Cork City had been interfered with by a lack of funds.[19]

In January 1967, it was reported that Cork City had fallen significantly behind its housing programme, and according to Alderman S. D. Barrett, speaking at a meeting of Cork

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[18] *Evening Echo 25/5/1966*

[19] *Evening Echo 7/10/1966*

Corporation, only 850 of the scheduled 2,850 houses in the five-year plan were likely to be built. He declared bluntly that the Corporation was “coddling the people” and that it was widely acknowledged that the promised houses would not be constructed. Alderman Barrett criticised the official report presented to the Corporation. The report noted a target of 155 houses for the current financial year, yet the revised estimate was only 128. On 11 November of the previous year, the Corporation had received a report from the City Manager indicating that 1,350 dwellings were urgently required. The five-year plan aimed for 2,850 houses, but Alderman Barrett remarked that, at the rate progress was proceeding, even completing 850 would be fortunate. The report also demonstrated a slowing in the Corporation’s construction pace, both in direct labour and contract schemes. For example, building 60 houses at Closses required two years - 30 a year - yet the programme called for 119 houses over 20 months. Another report referenced a deputation from the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers’ Trade Union, which noted that the Corporation now employed 16 masons compared with 40 a decade earlier. Alderman Barrett argued that there was little point in the City Manager projecting the construction of 2,850 houses if the Corporation was only capable of producing the lowest number of dwellings in his 17 years of membership. The urgent housing need remained at 1,350 units, a figure likely to rise as more houses fell into disrepair and required condemnation. Furthermore, a scheme of 300 houses had been removed from Corporation control by the Minister for Local Government the previous year, with no construction undertaken. Mr. E. P. Stanley suggested that, given arrangements for a 650-house scheme in the Glen-Assumption Road area and a relaxation in finances, the Corporation might approach the Minister to commence the scheme and discuss broader housing needs for the city. He emphasised that the Glen-Assumption Road scheme had been postponed indefinitely and that clarification from the Minister was required. Stanley lamented that the city Corporation, after six years, had nothing to show for its efforts in housing. Mr. S. McCarthy proposed reinstating the former practice of members visiting construction sites to

inspect progress, though Alderman Mrs. Joyce observed that such inspections had not accelerated work. Mr. H. Reid, presiding in the absence of the Lord Mayor, Alderman Sean Casey, T.D., urged members to keep politics out of the debate to allow calm and rational consideration of the housing problem. Alderman S. Allen countered that six years prior, 300 houses had been built. Barrett reiterated that output had been insufficient, noting that three years earlier, many tradesmen had left for private construction, reducing Corporation output to 175 houses while private housing rose to 500. Mr. D. Cronin expressed confidence in Ministerial plans for Cork City, citing oversubscription of the last loan and expectations of further funds. Mr. P. Wyse, T.D., cautioned that before inviting the Minister to discuss housing, the Corporation needed to ensure its direct labour schemes were properly organised. Mr. T. P. Leahy noted that 600 houses in the city had been condemned and emphasised that while materials, workers, and demand existed, the Corporation lacked funds. Mr. P. O'Donovan explained that the Glen-Assumption Road scheme, costing £2 million for 650 houses, had been taken over by the Minister with Corporation approval, and the city could not have undertaken it independently. Alderman Barrett highlighted that the Corporation had been cut by £324,000 in housing funds due to the Minister's assumption of the scheme, delaying construction further. He recalled that in 1956, despite a severe credit squeeze, the Minister for Finance had provided funds that allowed the construction of 491 houses in a single year. Mr. Reid again urged members to avoid political conflict, emphasising that housing needs transcended party lines. Barrett concluded that the ongoing shortage of houses reflected the present Government's policy. Both Mr. Stanley's and Mr. McCarthy's motions to address the situation were passed unanimously.

It was also reported that the interest on loans provided by Cork Corporation under the Housing Acts had been set at 8½ per cent, effective from 28 November of the previous year. Members of the city Corporation were informed of this change through orders circulated by the City Manager at the meeting. The notification explained that the increase

followed a rise in the rate of interest charged on advances from the Local Loans Fund. Presiding at the meeting, Mr. H. Reid noted that the Manager, Mr. Walter MacEvilly, was reviewing cases of applicants who had submitted plans prior to the interest rate increase. Mr. E. P. Stanley remarked that the higher rate would represent a significant setback for those seeking to build their own homes and would place additional demands on the Corporation for housing provision. The Corporation decided to refer the report back to the Manager to obtain further information on the potential effects of the interest rate increase.[20]

Later in January 1967, Cork Corporation took a significant, if contentious, step towards addressing the long-standing question of itinerant families within the city. A proposal was brought forward to house five such families in municipal dwellings, marking what officials described as the first phase of a broader plan to integrate itinerants into established urban housing schemes. At the time, it was estimated that between thirty and forty itinerant families were living in Cork City and its suburbs. If the initial effort proved successful, the Corporation hoped ultimately to provide homes for all. The houses designated for this purpose were located at Adelaide Street and Frenche's Quay, modest but permanent residences intended to replace the precarious living conditions many of these families had long endured. Yet the decision, though recommended by the Housing Committee, exposed deep divisions within the Corporation itself. Opposition came from a small but vocal minority. Among them, Councillor J. Barrett argued that the city was not yet prepared for such a move, urging that the proposal be reconsidered. He was supported by Councillor D. Cronin, who suggested instead that itinerant families be rehoused several miles beyond the city boundaries. Their stance reflected a broader unease among some, who questioned both the timing and the location of the scheme. Others, however, spoke forcefully in favour. Alderman Mrs. Joyce framed the proposal in moral terms, describing it as "a most human act" and challenging her colleagues to consider whether society would continue to

[20] *Evening Echo 11/1/1967*

marginalise itinerant communities. Her remarks were echoed by Councillor E. P. Stanley, who emphasised that the families selected had been carefully vetted and argued that failure to include them within the civic community would be a denial of Christian responsibility. Supporters also sought to counter practical concerns. Councillor W. Kenneally expressed confidence that proper oversight would accompany the families' transition into their new homes, while Councillor A. Barry looked to the future, suggesting that within a decade these families would likely be fully assimilated into the life of the city. Councillor P. Wyse went further, asserting that some of the families in question would prove better tenants than many from more privileged backgrounds, and that opposition to the scheme was, in part, rooted in misunderstanding.

Critics, however, remained unconvinced. Councillor S. Allen pointed to the financial burden that previous settlements of itinerants had allegedly placed on ratepayers, citing costs incurred in areas such as Churchfield and Frenche's Villas over the preceding twelve years. While not opposing assistance in principle, he argued that responsibility should lie with a government commission already established to address the issue. As an alternative, he proposed temporary accommodation in a barracks at Tivoli, with permanent housing to follow only after a period of probation. The debate also revealed more personal perspectives. The Lord Mayor, Councillor S. Casey, drew upon his own experience of a local itinerant family whose children had attended school alongside his own, recalling their regular attendance and neat appearance as evidence of the potential for successful integration. He identified the families selected for housing as the Dunne, Dooley, McCarthy, Cullen, and O'Driscoll families - names that underscored the long-standing presence of itinerant communities within the City of Cork. Some councillors attempted to strike a balance between support and caution. Councillor S. Barrett emphasised the Corporation's obligation to provide housing, while also warning that eligibility should be limited to families with an established history in the city, lest the initiative encourage further inward migration. Meanwhile,

Mrs. J. Dowdall challenged what she saw as exaggerated criticisms of itinerants, noting that other sectors of society were equally responsible for public nuisances and dismissing proposals to relocate families outside the city as impractical and unjust.

As the discussion drew to a close, there were signs of compromise. Councillor Cronin withdrew his opposition on the understanding that the scheme might proceed on a trial basis. Nevertheless, a final attempt to delay the decision was defeated by a clear majority: twelve votes to three. Thus, despite resistance, the Corporation approved the measure. The decision marked a notable moment in Cork City's social history.

The city councillors of Cork Corporation were also told that the Minister for Local Government has been invited to meet that body to discuss the housing situation in Cork City. Mr. E. P. Stanley asked the City Manager had any action been taken on a decision of the Corporation to approach the Minister. Mr. MacEvilly replied that the invitation had already been extended to a meeting. The Lord Mayor, Ald. Sean Casey, presided at the meeting.[21]

At a subsequent meeting of the city council, the contentious question of rehousing itinerant families once again came before the chamber, revealing both the persistence of the issue and the growing intensity of public and political debate. A motion to refer back an earlier recommendation - under which selected itinerant families were to be housed at Adelaide Street and Frenche's Quay - was ultimately defeated, though not without considerable disagreement. The matter arose from a report submitted by the Corporation's General Purposes Committee, which had examined not only the housing proposal but also the related and highly charged issue of wandering horses in certain districts of the city. With only one dissenting voice, the Committee had endorsed a limited scheme: one family was to be rehoused at No. 12 Frenche's Quay, two families at No. 19 Adelaide Street, and

[21] *Evening Echo 25/1/1967*

two additional families through the Corporation's ordinary housing process. However, it was recommended that No. 20 Adelaide Street should not be used for this purpose. Discussion in the council chamber quickly extended beyond housing policy to broader concerns about public order and the conditions in which itinerant families were living. Alderman S. Allen drew attention to the problem of wandering horses, particularly in the Churchfield area, arguing that existing penalties were ineffective. The nominal fine imposed for impounded animals, he maintained, did little to deter the practice. In stark language, he described conditions in the area as resembling a battlefield, and suggested that military facilities at Rockgrove Camp on Little Island might be repurposed to accommodate itinerants. Other councillors pressed for clarity on responsibility. Councillor E. P. Stanley queried whether the Corporation bore liability for unfenced lands, while Councillor T. P. Leahy emphasised the urgency of addressing the issue of stray animals, insisting that many members underestimated the scale of the problem in affected neighbourhoods. Yet the central question remained the proposed housing scheme. Councillor James Barrett also formally moved that the recommendation be referred back, arguing that it was unfair both to settled residents and to the itinerant families themselves. In his view, families should first be placed in a separate community where they might demonstrate their suitability for integration. His position was seconded by Alderman Allen, who reiterated the idea that such families should "prove themselves" before being accommodated within established residential areas.

This perspective was challenged by others who supported the Corporation's integration policy. Councillor D. Cronin commended the City Manager's efforts, while Councillor Leahy offered a more personal account of one of the families concerned, describing a household headed by a grandmother and a widowed mother with six children. These, he argued, were precisely the kinds of vulnerable families the Corporation had a duty to assist. He also stressed that the selection process had been thorough, involving detailed inquiries by municipal officials. The debate grew

increasingly heated. The Lord Mayor, Alderman S. Casey, pointedly observed that some of the most vocal critics had not attended the earlier discussions, where the proposal had been examined in detail. This remark provoked a sharp exchange with Alderman Allen, which briefly descended into personal recrimination and drew audible reactions from members of the public in the chamber. The Lord Mayor, however, declined to engage further in the dispute, insisting that proceedings remain orderly. When put to a vote, the amendment to refer the proposal back was defeated by eleven votes to three, reaffirming the Corporation's commitment - albeit a contested one - to the gradual integration of itinerant families into city housing.

The meeting then turned once more to the issue of wandering animals, a problem closely associated in the minds of many councillors with itinerant life. Alderman S. D. Barrett proposed consultation with the Gardaí, suggesting that direct observation of conditions in affected areas would underscore the seriousness of the situation. Alderman Mrs. Joyce, meanwhile, recommended that the matter be addressed through the courts. Officials acknowledged the complexity of the issue. While both the Gardaí and the Corporation possessed powers to impound animals, the low fees involved rendered enforcement largely ineffective, often resulting in a cycle in which animals were simply reclaimed and returned to the roads. The difficulties faced by residents - particularly on the north side of the city - were recognised as substantial, yet there was also an emerging consensus that lasting solutions lay not in punitive measures alone but in broader social integration.

This view was reinforced in a report from the city Finance Committee, which noted that residents of Adelaide Street and Frenche's Quay had formally protested the proposed housing allocations. In response, the Committee recommended deferring final consideration pending further information from the City Manager, including the costs of acquiring and repairing the properties and a detailed account of how the families selected for rehousing had been chosen. Taken together, the proceedings illustrate a moment of transition in

the city's civic life: a period in which older attitudes of exclusion and control coexisted uneasily with newer efforts at inclusion, and in which practical concerns, public pressure, and moral argument combined to shape policy in complex and often contentious ways.

At the meeting of Cork Corporation, attention turned from the specific question of itinerant housing to the broader and increasingly urgent issue of the city's overall housing crisis. Councillors considered a communication from the Department of Local Government, sent in response to an earlier letter of January 11, in which the Corporation had outlined its concerns regarding housing shortages and development delays. The Department's reply indicated that the Minister was willing to meet representatives of the Corporation, but had requested in advance a detailed memorandum specifying the matters the city council wished to discuss. This prompted some frustration among members. Councillor E. P. Stanley argued that the Department already possessed sufficient information and questioned the need for further documentation. In contrast, the Lord Mayor, Alderman S. Casey, suggested that the request was reasonable, observing that the Minister might benefit from a clear outline of the Corporation's priorities before entering into discussions.

Among the issues raised, the stalled housing scheme at the Glen emerged as a particular source of dissatisfaction. Alderman Mrs. Joyce recalled that the Minister's predecessor had promised the construction of hundreds of houses in the area, a commitment that had since failed to materialise. Her remarks reflected a broader concern that ambitious plans were being announced but not delivered. Other councillors identified additional matters requiring urgent attention. Alderman S. Allen and Councillor H. Reid pointed to the question of tenant purchase schemes, suggesting that the terms under which tenants might acquire their homes should form part of any discussions with the Minister. This theme was later echoed by Councillor D. Cronin, who proposed that tenants wishing to buy their houses should receive some allowance in recognition of rent already paid over many

years. A more general proposal was put forward by Councillor A. A. Healy, who formally suggested inviting the Minister down to Cork to engage in a comprehensive discussion on housing policy. He argued that not all aspects of the crisis had been fully addressed in correspondence and that a direct meeting would allow for a more thorough exchange of views. The Lord Mayor supported this approach, recommending that the City Manager provide the Minister with all relevant reports while making clear the Corporation's desire for a wide-ranging discussion. The depth of the city's housing difficulties was further underscored by Alderman S. D. Barrett, who proposed sending the Minister a series of monthly reports illustrating the persistent delays affecting building programmes. These documents, he suggested, would demonstrate the extent of what he described as a "malaise" in housing provision, including the stark reality that the Corporation had recently concluded it could construct no more than thirty houses per year under existing constraints. Councillor T. P. Leahy reinforced this sense of urgency by referring to a comprehensive assessment indicating that Cork City would require approximately 2,500 new houses over the following five years to meet current demand. This estimate took into account not only population pressures, but also the need to replace obsolete and unfit dwellings. He also highlighted the unresolved issue of the Boyce's Street clearance area, where redevelopment had yet to proceed, urging that preparatory work be accelerated so that progress could be made when funding eventually became available.

Despite the range of views expressed, there was a shared recognition that a more strategic engagement with central government was necessary. The Lord Mayor cautioned against delving too deeply into specific policy debates in advance of the Minister's visit, suggesting that such matters would be more effectively addressed in direct discussion. In the end, the Council agreed on a practical course of action. The City Manager, W. MacEvilly, was tasked with forwarding all relevant documentation to the Department, thereby laying the groundwork for a future meeting. The episode illustrates the mounting pressures facing Cork City

in this period, as local authorities grappled with limited resources, ambitious housing targets, and growing public expectation, all within the constraints of a centralised system of decision-making.[22]

A feature by the '*Evening Echo*' in March 1967 outlined how Cork Corporation found itself grappling with an escalating housing crisis, prompting both ambitious planning and significant frustration. In January 1965, the city Corporation submitted to the Minister for Local Government a bold proposal to construct a scheme of 600 houses in the Glen area. Conceived as a "package deal," the plan was innovative in the Irish context: private building interests would be invited to submit proposals encompassing not only construction, but also the planning and design of the development. It represented a pioneering attempt by a local authority to adopt a more integrated and modern approach to housebuilding. Despite its promise, however, the scheme failed to progress. Shortly after its submission, the Minister visited the City of Cork and addressed the Corporation directly on the broader housing situation. During this visit, he proposed an alternative approach. Rather than proceeding independently with the Glen development, Cork City was encouraged to participate in a larger, collaborative initiative based on "system building" - a modern construction method involving prefabricated components. This proposed scheme aimed to deliver some 2,000 houses across multiple authorities, including Cork, Limerick, and potentially the Shannon Airport area. Although Cork Corporation had expressed a preference to advance its own project, members were persuaded by the Minister's argument that economies of scale would make a larger, coordinated scheme more effective. Reluctantly, the Corporation agreed to defer its original proposal and cooperate with the national plan. This decision, however, would prove consequential. As economic conditions tightened, the Minister's scheme itself was postponed due to limitations on available capital for housing. In the meantime, Cork Corporation had continued to prepare for expansion, acquiring land sufficient to support a

[22] *Evening Echo 15/2/1967*

substantial building programme. By this stage, sites had been secured for approximately 2,800 houses across several key areas: Togher, Holly Hill (extending development already underway in Churchfield), Mayfield, and the Glen–Assumption Road district.

Corporation members (city councillors) increasingly felt that their earlier willingness to defer the Glen scheme had placed them at a disadvantage. During a period marked by financial constraint - often described as a “credit squeeze” - they argued that local progress had been unnecessarily delayed in deference to a national scheme that had itself failed to materialise. As a result, pressure mounted to revive and advance the Glen development independently. Looking ahead, the scale of the city's housing needs was stark. The Corporation estimated that approximately 4,350 new houses would be required over the following five years to meet demand. Of these, it was anticipated that private developers might provide around 1,500, leaving the Corporation responsible for delivering the remaining 2,850. Traditional construction methods were expected to account for only about 1,000 of these, with the balance - some 1,850 houses - depending on system building techniques. Such methods, already widely used in Europe and the United States, were seen as essential to achieving the necessary speed and volume of construction. Even beyond this five-year horizon, demand showed little sign of easing. If targets could be met, it was projected that Cork would need to sustain a building rate of roughly 600 houses per year, divided between public and private sectors. Within this broader framework, the role of National Building Agency Ltd. was also significant. Established by the Minister for Local Government, the Agency was intended to supplement both local authority and private sector efforts, particularly in situations where neither could adequately respond. Its involvement reflected an increasing recognition that the housing crisis required not only local initiative but also coordinated national support. In total, these developments illustrate both the ambition and the constraints that shaped housing policy in Cork City during this period. Innovative ideas and substantial preparatory work were often undermined by financial limitations and

shifting national priorities, leaving the Corporation to balance long-term planning with the immediate pressures of a growing city in need of homes.[23]

In the decades after the Second World War, as Cork struggled to modernise its housing and infrastructure, one of its most persistent and uncomfortable realities lay at the margins - both geographic and social. Along the lower stretch of Sun Valley Drive, where it met Wolfe Tone Street, a makeshift encampment stretched across a refuse-strewn patch of ground. For more than half the road's length, the land had become an informal settlement, home to six or seven itinerant families whose lives unfolded in caravans anchored against mud and stone. Horses grazed along the grassy edges while children played nearby, their movements shaped by the same sodden ground through which adults trudged daily. A March 1967 feature in the '*Evening Echo*' outlined the challenges.

The physical conditions were stark. Caravan wheels sank into the mire; damp crept into every corner of living space. Yet these material hardships only hinted at a deeper exclusion. At the time, several itinerant families elsewhere in the city - at Churchfield and at a roadside camp near Black Ash - were in the process of being rehoused. For those at Sun Valley Drive, however, there was little immediate hope. One young woman living there captured the human dimension of this crisis with quiet clarity. Sitting inside a leaking caravan, surrounded by her five small children, her circumstances spoke more forcefully than any question put to her. She had once lived in a conventional house but, after marriage, found herself drawn into a cycle of transience and administrative invisibility. Though her name had long been listed for a council house, she lacked the means to pursue or advocate for her claim. In a system that relied on persistence and presence, her mobility had worked against her. Her insistence - "I am not different" - challenged a widely held assumption of the time: that itinerant families were somehow separate from, or unwilling to join, settled urban society. For her, and

[23] *Evening Echo 1/3/1967*

for many like her, the desire was simple and urgent. Any house, even one condemned, would mean dry floors, separate rooms, and the possibility of sending children consistently to school. The issue was not reluctance, but access.

By the mid-1960s, Cork Corporation had begun to formalise its response. In 1965, it adopted a policy aimed at the permanent resettlement of itinerant families who regarded Cork as their base. The plan was cautious and gradual: an initial focus on housing 38 families over an unspecified period. Officials were equally clear about an unspoken concern - that improved provision might attract additional families into the city. The early stages of this policy revealed both progress and tension. A voluntary organisation working with itinerant communities conducted surveys and helped identify five families for immediate rehousing. One family was successfully placed at French's Quay, while others were earmarked for houses on Adelaide Street. Yet this plan quickly encountered resistance. Local residents and business interests objected to the concentration of multiple itinerant families in a confined area, raising fears - often framed in the language of planning, but rooted in social anxiety - of creating a "ghetto."

In response, the Corporation revised its approach, reducing the number of families assigned to Adelaide Street and leaving the placement of others uncertain. The episode highlighted a recurring obstacle: while policy could be agreed in council chambers, its implementation depended on public acceptance, which was far from assured. Underlying these debates was a structural imbalance of power. As itinerant families typically lacked fixed addresses, they were excluded from the electoral register and, therefore, from direct political influence. Their needs were mediated through officials, voluntary groups, and, occasionally, sympathetic public figures. Notably, despite some opposition within the Corporation itself, only a small minority of councillors voted against the rehousing initiative - suggesting that institutional attitudes were beginning, however slowly, to shift.

Housing alone, however, was never seen as a complete solution. Both officials and voluntary workers recognised that settlement required preparation and support. Efforts were made to identify semi-permanent sites where families could reside without fear of eviction, though these too met with organised local opposition. At the same time, educational initiatives began to address longer-term integration. Evening classes for itinerant children were established at the North Monastery, with the aim of preparing them for entry into mainstream schools. Some educators had already taken steps in this direction. At Blackpool Boys' National School, small numbers of itinerant children had been integrated into regular classes for several years. The experience suggested that, given manageable numbers and consistent attendance, integration posed little disruption. More importantly, it demonstrated the central role of education in bridging divides. Teachers observed that many itinerant parents were eager for their children to receive schooling - an encouraging sign that aspirations for stability and inclusion were widely shared.

By the late 1960s, Cork City stood at an early but significant moment in addressing what was then termed the "itinerant problem." The language of the period reflected its limitations, often framing communities in terms of deficiency or adjustment. Yet beneath this was a gradual recognition of common ground: that the barriers faced by itinerant families were not rooted in difference of character, but in inequality of opportunity. The scene at Sun Valley Drive - mud, caravans, children at play - thus becomes more than a snapshot of hardship. It marks a point of transition, where entrenched patterns of exclusion began, unevenly, to give way to policies of inclusion. Whether these efforts would succeed in achieving full integration within a generation, as some hoped, remained uncertain. But for families like the young woman's, even the first steps - towards a roof, a classroom, a fixed address - represented the possibility of a different future.[24]

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[24] *Evening Echo 11/3/1967*

As outlined in August 1967, what had long been experienced as overcrowding, delay, and frustration could now be expressed in stark numerical terms: the city required 1,375 Corporation dwellings immediately, with thousands more projected in the years ahead. Housing was no longer simply a social issue - it had become a matter of planning, finance, and long-term urban strategy. At the centre of this effort stood Cork Corporation, working alongside the National Building Agency (N.B.A), a government-backed body established to accelerate large-scale residential construction. The Agency had assumed responsibility for an ambitious programme of 1,800 new dwellings across the city, including 600 flats - an indication of a gradual shift toward higher-density urban living. Land for this development had already been secured by the Corporation, reflecting a degree of foresight in anticipating expansion. Yet progress was not straightforward. After inviting proposals from private contractors to both build and finance the scheme, the Agency entered a prolonged phase of consultation. By mid-year, discussions were ongoing with seven potential developers, but tangible progress remained slow, prompting concern within the Corporation.

Meanwhile, the city's own building programme continued at various stages of development. A modest number of homes were actively under construction, while hundreds more lingered in the tendering and planning phases. When combined with the Agency's proposed output, the total housing programme approached 2,903 dwellings - a substantial figure, yet still insufficient when measured against both current demand and future need. What made the situation particularly pressing was not just the backlog, but the persistence of demand. Even if the immediate shortfall could be addressed, Cork faced what officials described as a "recurring need" for approximately 600 new dwellings each year. This was to be met through a balance of public and private construction, reflecting an emerging partnership between municipal authorities and the building industry. Over a four- to five-year period, this translated into a requirement for 4,375 new homes. Of these, roughly 1,500 were expected to come from private developers, with the

remaining 2,875 falling to the Corporation. The scale of this undertaking required not only land acquisition - which had largely been achieved - but also the provision of essential infrastructure. Much of the newly acquired land still lacked basic services such as roads, water supply, and sewerage, underscoring the gap between planning and readiness. Looking further ahead, the projections became even more striking. Between 1972 and 1981, the city anticipated the need for an additional 6,000 housing sites. Combined with earlier estimates, this brought the total requirement to over 10,000 new dwellings by 1981 - effectively reshaping the urban footprint of Cork and completing the development of its newly extended boundaries.

Underlying these projections was a less visible but equally significant issue: the ageing of the city's housing stock. A substantial proportion of Cork's homes had been built before the turn of the twentieth century, with thousands dating back to before 1860. Even at a conservative rate of decline - just 1 per cent per year - hundreds of houses would need to be replaced annually simply to maintain existing capacity. This meant that new construction was not only about growth, but also about renewal. Against this backdrop, the Corporation presented its approach as a "progressive policy," combining direct labour with contracted work and integrating state-supported initiatives like those of the National Building Agency. The planned distribution of the 1,800 Agency-built homes reflected a deliberate effort to expand across multiple districts: the Glen and Assumption Road area, the growing suburb of Mayfield, and the developing zones around Togher and Pouladuff Road. There was also provision for further expansion into Knocknaheeny, where significant land had recently been acquired. Yet even as plans multiplied and projections extended decades into the future, a degree of uncertainty remained. The Corporation, while responsible for the overall strategy, had limited control over the pace of the Agency's work. Progress depended on negotiations, financing, and the capacity of the construction sector to deliver at scale.

Meanwhile, in areas such as Gurranabraher and Churchfield, another, more unpredictable problem had taken hold. Wandering horses, long associated with itinerant communities on the city's fringes, had become an increasingly visible and troubling presence on suburban streets. The issue was not new. By the late 1960s, residents and authorities alike understood it as a persistent problem stretching back at least a decade. Yet its consequences had grown more serious. Only months earlier, a young motorcyclist had been killed following a collision with a horse at night - a stark and tragic reminder of the risks posed when animals and modern traffic shared the same poorly lit roads. Much of the concern centred on the Churchfield area, where residents reported repeated damage to gardens and property. In the early hours of the morning, horses would stray into housing estates, trampling lawns and uprooting plants. For householders striving to maintain a sense of order and pride in newly developed neighbourhoods, such incursions were both costly and demoralising.

The animals were known to belong to itinerant families encamped at Valley Drive, off Fair Hill, linking the issue to the wider social and housing tensions already evident across the city. What had once been regarded as a nuisance was now evolving into a broader public safety concern. During the day, the sight of young boys mounting the unattended horses and riding them through residential streets introduced new dangers - not only for the riders themselves, but also for pedestrians and motorists unaccustomed to such hazards. Responsibility for managing the situation fell largely to Garda Síochána, whose role was both reactive and constrained. Their approach typically involved impounding stray horses and attempting to identify and prosecute their owners for trespass. In practice, however, this process was slow and often ineffective. The mobility of itinerant families meant that by the time summonses were issued, those responsible had frequently moved on, leaving little opportunity for enforcement. Facilities themselves were limited. The city pound on Blarney Street could accommodate only eleven horses at a time, far fewer than the number roaming the area. Once impounded, animals could be

reclaimed for a nominal fee, a system that did little to deter repeat incidents. As a result, the cycle of wandering, capture, and release continued with little long-term resolution. Local institutions were left to devise their own responses. In Farranree, the gardens of the parochial house had suffered extensive damage in previous years. By maintaining constant vigilance - both day and night - the clergy managed, for a time, to keep the animals at bay. Such efforts, however, placed an additional burden on communities already grappling with the challenges of rapid urban change.[25]

The proposed Green Lane housing scheme in 1967 illustrates both the practical and political challenges facing urban development in Cork City during a period of acute housing demand. Presented to Cork Corporation under the-then chairmanship of P. Wyse, the scheme combined modern design features with high-density planning. These included a centralised television relay system to reduce the need for multiple aerials, as well as shared ground-level storage for prams and bicycles - elements reflecting changing urban living patterns. The development was planned to include 107 dwellings (76 maisonettes and 31 flats), along with garages, parking, and an electricity substation. However, the projected cost - nearly £493,000 - quickly became a central point of contention. Construction expenses, driven in part by the use of five-storey buildings and high land acquisition costs, led to estimates that tenants would need to pay rents of approximately £6 per week. Many councillors considered this figure unrealistic for working-class occupants. Debate within the Corporation revealed differing perspectives on both cost and design. Some members criticised the practicality of multi-storey living, particularly for families, citing concerns about access and suitability. Others questioned whether such investment should instead support lower-density housing or private building initiatives.

Financial transparency also emerged as an issue. City councillors called for a more detailed breakdown of costs, particularly professional and consultancy fees, reflecting

[25] *Evening Echo 19/8/1967*

their responsibility for public expenditure. At the same time, there was recognition that abandoning the scheme would exacerbate existing shortages, leaving over one hundred households without planned accommodation. Alternative approaches were suggested, including revisiting earlier development plans in central areas such as Grattan Street, or reconsidering the balance between flats and traditional housing. Some members argued that flats were more appropriate for smaller households, while others emphasised the difficulty of acquiring land in the city centre, making higher-density construction necessary. Ultimately, despite acknowledgement of the housing need, the city Corporation decided to refer the scheme back for further consideration.[26]

The question of how best to address housing shortages in Cork City was not limited to direct construction by local authorities. An alternative approach - encouraging private house building through the provision of serviced land - was advanced by leading politician Peter Barry during a meeting of the Fine Gael in Blackrock. Barry argued that Cork Corporation should expand its role beyond building homes for those in need, to include the supply of reasonably priced, fully serviced sites. Such sites, equipped with essential infrastructure like water, roads, and sewerage, would enable individuals to construct their own houses and thereby ease overall demand on public housing. He also highlighted the limitations of existing government supports. The state grant for private house building, set at £275 and unchanged for nearly two decades, had failed to keep pace with rising construction costs. In his view, increasing this grant would provide a stronger incentive for private builders and prospective homeowners.

Financial pressures on ratepayers were identified as another barrier. A significant proportion of local rates - over 40 per cent - was attributed to health services and the subsidisation of Corporation housing. Barry proposed that a greater share of these costs should be transferred to central government. In particular, he suggested increasing the contribution to health

[26] *Evening Echo 23/8/1967*

funding, especially for hospitals serving wider regional populations. He further argued that if the full cost of Corporation housing - both capital investment and rent subsidies - were gradually assumed by the national government, local authorities would be in a stronger position to expand housing provision. Such a shift, he suggested, could also reduce local rates by up to 10 to 12 shillings, easing the financial burden on households. The proposals reflect a broader policy debate of the period: whether housing shortages should be addressed primarily through public provision, private initiative, or a combination of both, supported by adjustments in national and local financing structures.[27]

During a closely contested by-election campaign in 1967, disagreements over the performance and intentions of local representatives were brought sharply into public debate. At a meeting of the Fine Gael organisation in the city, Stephen Barrett issued a direct challenge to Sean French, a candidate for Fianna Fáil. Barrett called on French to substantiate or withdraw claims that he had attempted to undermine efforts to solve Cork's housing problems. He rejected the claim that he had advocated reducing the construction of Corporation housing, describing it as entirely unfounded. Barrett positioned himself as a consistent critic of government policy, arguing that he had repeatedly pressed for greater action on housing both within Cork Corporation and at national level. He pointed to actual building output to illustrate the scale of the problem: 126 houses completed in the previous year, 138 projected for the current year, and 175 planned for the following year - figures well below what was required to address demand. He attributed these shortfalls primarily to labour shortages and insufficient government funding. While acknowledging a recently announced plan to eliminate the housing shortage by 1971, Barrett expressed scepticism, suggesting that such initiatives were timed to coincide with electoral pressures rather than long-term planning. The debate was reinforced by Liam Burke, also speaking for Fine Gael, who criticised the gap between

[27] *Evening Echo 29/8/1967*

targets and delivery. He referred to a five-year plan launched in 1966 to build 2,850 houses - equivalent to 570 per year - but noted that in its first year only 138 had been completed. This discrepancy, he argued, demonstrated systemic delays and inefficiencies. Particular criticism was directed at the handling of a major housing scheme at the Glen–Assumption Road. Responsibility for this development had been transferred from the Corporation to a government body following assurances that construction would begin within three months. However, according to Burke, little tangible progress had occurred until the approach of the by-election, raising questions about the timing and implementation of national housing initiatives. The exchange reflects broader political divisions over housing policy in Ireland at the time. Fine Gael representatives argued that successive government programmes had not prioritised working-class housing sufficiently, while also expressing cautious support for new initiatives aimed at addressing shortages.[28]

Councillor Seán French, addressing a by-election meeting, stated that Deputy Barrett had sought to present contradictory positions on the issue of housing in Cork. From the time the contract for the construction of 1,800 Corporation houses had been awarded to the National Building Agency, Barrett had, he claimed, consistently attempted to undermine confidence in the project. The Minister for Local Government had earlier announced that the housing requirements of Cork, as estimated by the Corporation, would be fully met by 1971 under the proposed programme. He outlined that the Corporation had submitted a plan aiming to deliver an average of 200 houses annually over a five-year period beginning in November 1966. This would result in the construction of at least 1,000 houses, which, when combined with the 1,800 units to be provided directly by the Government, would satisfy projected demand.

The Minister had accepted this programme, noting that sufficient sites were available and that there appeared to be no impediment to the Corporation achieving its targets,

[28] *Evening Echo 2/11/1967*

barring deliberate obstruction. French further urged Barrett to refrain from, in his view, irresponsible treatment of what he described as an urgent social issue. He called on him instead to cooperate with councillors from Fianna Fáil to ensure that the promised housing output would be delivered. French argued that, although Barrett professed a desire to see the housing shortage resolved, his actions suggested otherwise, implying that political considerations were influencing his stance. At the time, the Corporation had already completed 99 houses and expected to finish a further 85 before the end of the year, bringing the total to 184 - slightly below the annual target. Despite this, French maintained that Barrett had continued to portray the output as significantly inadequate.[29]

At a meeting of Cork Corporation in September 1968, presided over by the Deputy Lord Mayor, R. G. Sutton SC, Alderman P. Wyse, T.D., stated that the authority would have to take a serious look at the question of housing for elderly people. He expressed regret that the Corporation no longer maintained a clear policy for the aged, noting that they had previously advocated the inclusion of maisonettes for older couples in their housing schemes. Mr. D. Buckley acknowledged the general sympathy felt towards elderly couples but argued that the city Corporation's primary responsibility lay with young married couples, particularly in relation to the allocation of maisonettes. The City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, outlined the background to the issue. He recalled that a housing survey had revealed that many large three- and four-bedroom houses were occupied by single elderly individuals or older couples. This, he suggested, represented an inefficient use of housing resources. In response, the Corporation had incorporated bedsitters and one-bedroom flats into their building schemes, primarily intended for older people who were living in larger homes. However, Mr. MacEvilly explained that these units had failed to attract the intended occupants. Following a report from the housing officer, and in light of a significant housing shortage - particularly among couples with one child - the decision

[29] *Evening Echo 3/11/1967*

had been made to allocate these flats to younger families. Both the Corporation and the City Manager had agreed to this course of action at the time.

While acknowledging the need to address the situation of elderly citizens, Mr. MacEvilly stated that the Corporation had been compelled to prioritise what it considered the more urgent need. He concluded that young couples with children were in greater immediate need of accommodation and recommended that maisonettes continue to be allocated to them, while efforts should be made to provide larger housing as their circumstances required. Mr. V. W. O'Connell criticised the Corporation's approach, warning that if it could not adequately provide for older people, the matter should be brought before the public and possibly addressed by external bodies. He argued that no meaningful provision was being made for the elderly, who, he claimed, were often only accommodated once they became suitable for geriatric wards, where they remained until death. He commended Alderman Wyse for bringing attention to the issue. Mr. T. P. Leahy concluded the discussion by asserting that if the city Corporation was genuinely committed to social housing development, it should ensure that provision was made for both young and old alike.[30]

In January 1969, the '*Evening Echo*' reported that over the course of the previous decade, Cork Corporation's house-building programme experienced a marked decline, despite the persistence of severe housing difficulties affecting approximately 2,500 families in the city. Ten years earlier, the Corporation had been completing between 400 and 500 houses annually. By 1967, however, this figure had fallen sharply to 151, and in 1968 it declined further to just 76 completed houses, even though some 680 were reported to be under construction. This downturn occurred alongside the announcement of a major contract agreed in May of the preceding year between Cork Corporation and the National Building Agency Ltd. for the construction of 1,794 dwellings, scheduled for completion by March 1971 at a cost

[30] *Evening Echo 11/9/1968*

of £5,696,872. The development, located in Togher, had already fallen behind schedule due to a shortage of skilled tradesmen and adverse weather conditions. Delays were also reported in other schemes. Site development and civil works at Mayfield were running approximately three and a half months behind schedule, while the Glen housing scheme was recorded as having made no progress. At the same time, the scale of demand remained acute. Approximately 2,500 applicants were listed on the Corporation's housing waiting list at City Hall. A housing memorandum further estimated that over the following four to five years, a total of 4,275 dwellings would be required to meet the needs of city families. A Corporation housing report dated September 1967 highlighted the extent of the crisis. It recorded that 780 families were living in overcrowded conditions, while 128 families occupied dwellings deemed unfit for habitation and beyond economical repair. A further 83 families were involuntarily sharing accommodation with other households, and an additional 384 families required rehousing on compassionate, medical, or similar grounds. Projected future needs were equally significant. It was estimated that 1,200 houses would be required to accommodate families displaced by demolition, redevelopment, conversion, or obsolescence of existing dwellings. An additional 2,100 houses would be needed to meet the demands of a growing number of households, while a further 100 units were considered necessary to address such emergencies and unforeseen circumstances. Set against the continuing decline in annual house completions, these figures offered little reassurance to the many families who regularly attended the housing offices at City Hall in search of accommodation.[31]

At the end of January 1969, the Corporation considered a report from the City Architect and Town Planning Officer concerning the proposed development of 109 dwellings at the Ardmanning Beg Housing Scheme. The report noted that this phase represented the final section of the scheme and emphasised the importance of fully utilising all serviced land available for housing. It was therefore proposed that the

[31] *Evening Echo 16/1/1969*

development be offered for public tender rather than carried out by the direct labour unit. At the same time, the report indicated that continuity of employment for the direct labour unit would be maintained through ongoing work at the Knocknaheeny site. The housing types proposed for this final section were identical to those used in Section 2B of the Ardmanning Beg scheme. The planned accommodation comprised 16 two-storey two-bedroom houses, 57 two-storey three-bedroom houses, 12 two-storey four-bedroom houses, 16 three-bedroom maisonettes, 6 two-bedroom flats, and 2 three-bedroom flats, giving a total of 109 dwellings. These units were arranged in terraced blocks as part of the overall layout, which incorporated a substantial public open space.

The estimated total cost of the development amounted to £374,242. This included £13,484 for land acquisition and legal expenses, £46,185 for development works based on earlier estimates by the City Engineer, and £302,533.179 for construction costs, covering superstructures, underworks, and site works. A further £11,990 was allocated for fees and supervision. Following consideration, it was agreed to recommend adoption of the report, subject to the condition that awarding the scheme by contract would not disrupt the continuity of direct labour operations.

During the same proceedings, the City Manager, Mr W. MacEvilly, informed members that a deputation from the Trade Union group had been received. He reported that discussions had taken place with workers' representatives on site and that a full report would be presented to the Housing Committee at a later stage. The talks had addressed issues including improved overtime rates, enhanced sick pay, and possible improvements to the pension scheme. He indicated that these discussions were expected to result in significant improvements.[32]

In late February, Cork Corporation agreed to a suggestion made by Mr S. O'Leary that a deputation should be sent to the Minister to seek special consideration for the Corporation

[32] *Evening Echo 29/1/1969*

in respect of housing provision. The proposal related to anticipated increases in local rates, which were expected to rise by 14 shillings in the pound, with a corresponding increase of 2 shillings for sewerage over a five-year period. The issue had arisen during consideration of the Finance Committee report, which had highlighted the need for a "crash programme" of housing construction. Mr O'Leary proposed that special financial assistance be granted to the city Corporation in order to ease the burden of housing expenditure, which would otherwise fall directly on the ratepayers.[33]

In March 1969, the provision for capital spending of almost £4 million on housing in the coming year was taken as an indication of the high priority being given to that service, according to the Cork City Manager, Mr W. MacEvilly, when he presented the estimates of expenses for the year ending 31 March 1970 to members of Cork Corporation. In his report, the City Manager stated that this expenditure was part of the programme adopted by the Corporation a year and a half earlier. That programme, he explained, provided for an estimated capital expenditure of £11,800,000 on housing over a four to five year period. He noted that at the time the indications had been that rates for housing alone would rise by approximately 10 shillings in the pound (IR£) over that period. The programme was then under review, but it was considered certain that, because of rising prices and higher interest rates, the original estimates of both capital requirements and their eventual impact on rates would prove to have been too low. The Corporation was described as being irrevocably committed to almost all of the capital expenditure of close on £4 million estimated for the coming year. This allocation comprised £2,400,000 for the National Building Agency project, £970,000 for the acquisition of land and for the Corporation's own building by contract and direct labour, £525,000 for house purchase loans to private persons, and £75,000 for supplementary grants.

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[33] *Evening Echo 26/2/1969*

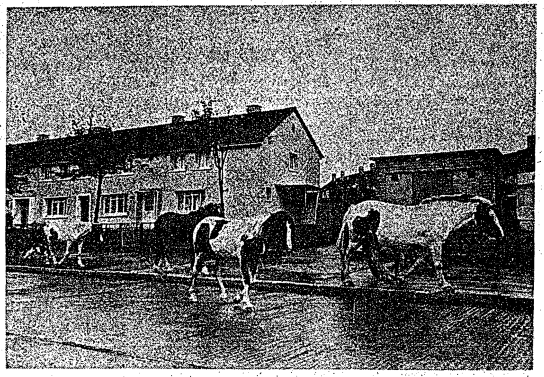
The National Building Agency contract provided for the handover of 809 dwellings during the year ahead, and it was expected that other contractors together with the direct labour unit would deliver a further 196 dwellings, giving a total output of 1,005 dwellings for the year. However, Mr MacEvilly noted that he was not, at that stage, in a position to say whether this level of output could be achieved in view of the known difficulties in the building industry. He further emphasised that expenditure on housing had become so substantial that it required the most careful management in terms of estimating need, programming, planning, financing, tenanting, and overall housing estate control. He expressed disappointment that the city Corporation had not yet taken a policy decision on proposals for the review of the renting scheme and the sale of Corporation houses, and he stressed the urgency and importance of an early decision. On the question of housing generally, he reported an acute difficulty in providing serviced sites. Private developers were already experiencing constraints. The Corporation had acquired, or was in the process of acquiring, almost all available open land in the city, but much of it was either inadequately serviced or entirely without services. He noted that substantial expenditure would fall on the Corporation for the provision of these services, after which portions of the land would be made available to private builders. He also stated that he had recently held discussions with representatives of the building industry on the matter.[34]

[34] *Evening Echo 28/3/1969*

*The Spangle Hill housing scheme in 1963.*
*(Source: RTÉ Archives)*

*A house constructed by Cork Corporation.*
*(Source: RTÉ Archives)*

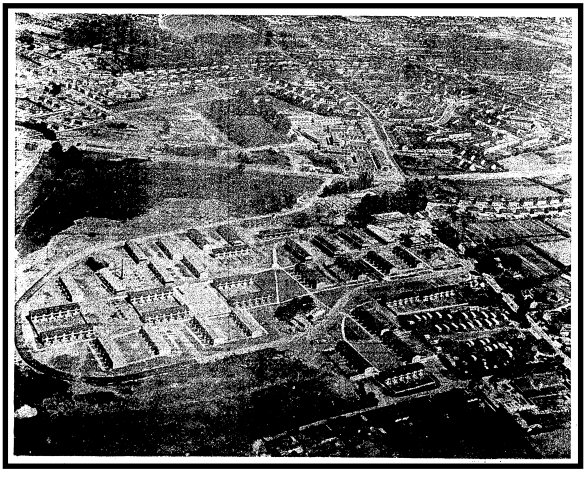
New Anxiety For Residents



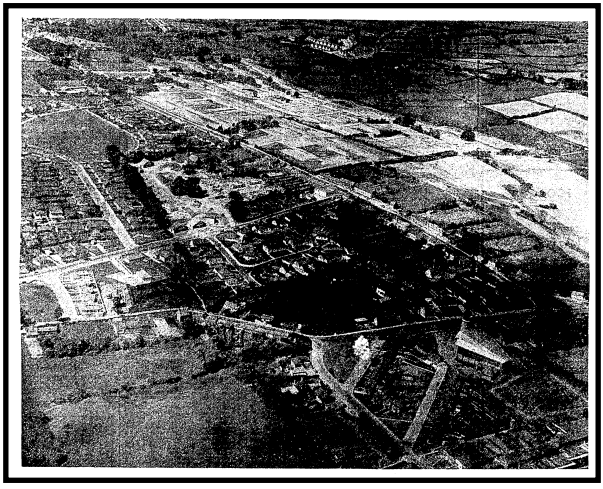
Wandering horses in the Churchfield Gurranabraher area. ("Echo").

**Wandering Horses Still A Problem In City Area**

*(Source: Evening Echo 19/8/1967)*



*Housing units constructed as part of a National Building Agency scheme in Togher, on the Southside of the city.*
*(Source: Evening Echo 28/7/1969)*



*A housing scheme under construction by the National Building Agency in Mayfield, on the city's Northside.*

*(Source: Evening Echo 28/7/1969)*

## REHOUSING THE REBEL CITY, 1970-1982

By 1970, questions of housing policy in the City of Cork gave rise not only to administrative debate but also to wider concerns about fairness, discrimination, and social inequality. These issues came into sharp focus during a lively discussion at a public meeting of Cork Corporation, prompted by press reports detailing the difficulties of the Cooper family in securing accommodation in the city. The reports had suggested that Mr. Cooper, a white man, had encountered obstacles in obtaining a flat because his wife and children were of "colour." This implication led to unease among members of the Corporation. While some councillors objected to what they saw as indirect criticism of the local authority, the majority took the view that the Corporation had no cause to answer such allegations. The City Manager, W. MacEvilly, addressed the matter directly, firmly rejecting any suggestion that racial discrimination had influenced housing decisions. He stated unequivocally that the Corporation had already provided homes for several families of diverse backgrounds, including a recently housed Indian family. He further dismissed claims that the Coopers had been refused on the grounds of lacking a fixed abode, noting that the Corporation had successfully accommodated a number of itinerant families and was making arrangements to house more. MacEvilly explained that the central issue in the Cooper case was not discrimination but residency and priority. The family, he said, had been in the Cork area only a few months, and granting them immediate housing would mean placing them ahead of long-established applicants who had been waiting for years. He emphasised that housing allocations were made without regard to class or background, and that any suggestion to the contrary was without foundation. This position was supported by several members. Alderman S. Allen endorsed the Manager's remarks, observing that all applicants, regardless of status, had been required to await their turn. He pointed out that even members' own families were subject to the same rules. Similarly, A. A. Healy, T.D., suggested that the city Corporation might be interpreting the newspaper report somewhat too defensively, arguing that criticism may not

have been directed at it in the first place - a view that appeared to command broad agreement. As the discussion developed, however, the focus widened beyond the specific case. Councillors began to consider broader questions of housing allocation and social policy. Healy proposed that, given the increasing number of refusals of newly built houses, the Corporation might consider prioritising skilled tradesmen and craftsmen. Such a policy, he argued, could encourage emigrants to return from Britain and help address local shortages of skilled labour, thereby accelerating building programmes. This suggestion was met with caution. F. Crowley, T.D., warned against what he regarded as a short-term and overly narrow approach. He maintained that fairness required that those already on the housing list should retain priority, rather than altering criteria to attract particular groups. Evidence of changing housing dynamics was presented in a report from the Housing Committee, which revealed that of 36 flats recently allocated in Togher, 22 had been refused. This raised further questions about the suitability of available housing and the preferences of applicants.

Despite assurances that no discrimination existed within the Corporation's procedures, the broader social implications of the debate were not lost on all members. V. W. O'Connell acknowledged that there was no evidence of racial bias in housing allocation but argued that deeper forms of inequality persisted within Co. Cork society. Drawing a provocative comparison, he suggested that while apartheid in South Africa was explicitly defined, inequality in Cork City operated in more subtle ways, dividing the privileged from the underprivileged, the wealthy from the poor. In a striking remark, he described the elderly poor as "the negroes of Cork," drawing attention to the conditions faced by older citizens living in inadequate housing. He called for the Housing Committee to investigate alternative ways of accommodating elderly people in the city, without resorting to institutional care, thereby highlighting what he saw as an overlooked social issue. The debate was ultimately brought to a close by the Lord Mayor, T. P. Leahy, who reiterated that the original report concerning the Cooper family had likely

not been directed at the Corporation. Nevertheless, he welcomed the opportunity to clarify its position, affirming that all housing applications would be assessed on their merits alone. The discussion, though centred on a single case, revealed the complex interplay of housing policy, social equity, and public perception in a rapidly changing urban society.[35]

During February 1970, in the course of a resumed debate in Dáil Éireann on a supplementary estimate for the Department of Local Government, members raised sharp concerns about housing policy, planning, and the broader direction of national development during a period of mounting economic pressure in the 1960s. Mr. M. Clinton, speaking for Fine Gael, drew attention to proposals under consideration by the Minister that would see the construction of high-rise, multi-storey housing in cities such as Waterford and Cork. He expressed strong opposition to such developments, arguing that they ran counter to the needs and preferences of ordinary people. In his view, families should be enabled to live in individual houses with gardens, rather than being confined to what he described as "crows' nests" atop fourteen-storey buildings. He voiced the hope that public opinion would ultimately prevent the widespread adoption of this form of urban housing. Mr. Garret FitzGerald, also of Fine Gael, broadened the debate by criticising the Government's handling of the Buchanan Report, a key planning document intended to guide regional development. He characterised the delay in reaching a decision on the report as one of the most serious examples of governmental procrastination during the decade, a time when rapid economic change was already placing significant strain on political and administrative systems. FitzGerald emphasised that the adoption of the Buchanan Report would bring about substantial shifts in population distribution across the country's towns and regions. The Government's failure to act, he argued, was obstructing not only decisions within the Department of Local Government but also essential planning across multiple areas of public administration. Without clarity on

[35] *Evening Echo 14/1/1970*

future population patterns, organisations such as Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE) could not effectively plan transport infrastructure, and local authorities, including Dublin Corporation, were left unable to prepare for future development. He further criticised the Department for maintaining what he described as excessively rigid control over local authorities. The requirement for repeated approvals - sometimes two, three, or even four times for the same project - was, he argued, unnecessarily cumbersome and hindered efficient progress. Turning to the broader issue of housing, FitzGerald identified it as the most pressing social challenge facing the State. Despite rising costs, he maintained that addressing housing needs must take priority, even if it required sacrifices in other areas of public spending. At times, he asserted, social needs were so urgent and intense that they demanded action regardless of short-term economic consequences. The debate concluded without resolution, with progress noted and further discussion adjourned, reflecting the complexity and urgency of the issues under consideration.

Around the same time, a meeting of the city council shows how at the turn of the 1970s, Cork Corporation found itself engaged in a protracted and, at times, contentious effort to finalise a scheme for the purchase of Corporation-built houses, a matter that reflected wider national concerns about housing policy, affordability, and local governance. At a meeting of the Corporation, the Lord Mayor, Councillor T. P. Leahy, reminded members that as far back as July 1966, the Corporation - sitting in committee - had agreed to submit its proposals for such a scheme to a full public meeting of the council. The document before members at the present sitting, he explained, was not a new proposal but merely a report outlining developments from a recent committee discussion. The central issue, he stressed, remained the decision taken in 1966. In light of this, he proposed that the matter should once again be examined in committee before being brought forward for a final decision at a public session. This approach, however, did not command universal support. A minority of councillors - Messrs. J. Bermingham, G. Carroll, and S. O'Leary - argued that the issue had already been

subject to sufficient delay and should be discussed immediately. When put to a vote, their position was decisively rejected, revealing a clear division within the city council on how best to proceed. Councillor S. O'Leary was particularly critical of the delays that had characterised the scheme's development. He contended that, had the Corporation acted promptly when the committee was first established, prospective purchasers would have benefited from more favourable borrowing conditions. The scheme, he noted, had originally been intended to run until March 1971; yet, owing to the continued postponements, there was a real danger that it might come into effect only at the very end of that period, rendering it practically meaningless. The issue of rising interest rates further underscored these concerns. In response to queries, the City Manager, Mr. W. MacEvilly, informed the council that when the proposal had been first formulated in July 1968, the prevailing interest rate stood at 7 per cent. By the time of the current discussion, it had risen to 8½ per cent. On a loan of £1,000, this increase would amount to an additional five shillings per week, or £13 annually - a figure that, as Mr. Carroll observed, would accumulate to approximately £425 over a 35-year repayment period. Such increases, it was implied, would place a significant additional burden on prospective homebuyers. Further criticism came from Mr. D. Buckley, who highlighted the Corporation's earlier decision to invite submissions from various organisations and members of the public on the issues of house sales and rent revisions. While the council had proceeded to discuss rent adjustments, he noted that it had refrained - on the advice of the City Manager - from engaging in similar discussions regarding the sale of houses. Buckley argued that this approach failed to show due consideration to those who had taken the time to submit their views and that their contributions deserved to be properly examined. The debate illustrated not only the practical challenges of implementing housing policy at a local level but also the tensions between administrative caution and political urgency, as Cork Corporation grappled

with decisions that would have lasting implications for home ownership and urban development.[36]

In May 1970, during Question Time in Dáil Éireann, the issue of housing provision in Cork City was raised in detail by Barry Desmond of the Labour Party, reflecting the growing concern at the time over shortages in both public and private accommodation. Desmond sought comprehensive information from the Minister for Local Government regarding housing output in the city since the mid-1960s. He requested figures for both local authority and privately provided houses from 1964 onwards, as well as the current number of applicants on Cork Corporation's housing list. In addition, he asked for estimates of the number of houses required over the following five years to address the persistent shortage, along with details of land held by the Corporation for housing development, including how much of it was serviced, how many houses were planned for construction, and the anticipated timelines for development. Replying on behalf of the Government, the Minister, Mr. Molloy, provided figures indicating a steady increase in housing provision over the latter half of the decade. The total number of local authority and grant-aided dwellings built in Cork City rose from 244 in 1964–65 to 361 in 1965–66, 562 in 1966–67, 491 in 1967–68, 654 in 1968–69, and reached 840 in 1969–70. These figures suggested a significant expansion in building activity, particularly toward the end of the period.

However, the Minister acknowledged limitations in the information available to his Department. He stated that up-to-date figures for the number of approved applicants on Cork Corporation's housing list were not held centrally. Nonetheless, he relayed the Corporation's own estimate that total housing need up to 31 March 1972 stood at 4,375 dwellings, of which approximately 2,875 would need to be provided directly by the local authority. No projections were available for the years beyond that date, nor were separate figures for housing demand in the suburban areas outside the

[36] *Cork Examiner 25/2/1970*

city's administrative boundary. The Minister also outlined the scale of the Corporation's ongoing building programme. At the time, work was in progress on 996 dwellings, while a further 149 were at the tender stage. In addition, plans existed for the provision of 1,389 more dwellings, indicating a substantial pipeline of construction activity. In terms of land resources, Cork Corporation had already acquired nearly 600 acres for housing purposes and was in the process of securing an additional 400 acres. Despite this, the Minister was unable to provide detailed information regarding how much of this land had been serviced, how many houses would ultimately be built on it, or when development would commence on the various sites. The exchange highlighted both the progress made in expanding housing supply and the continuing challenges of planning, data availability, and long-term provision in a period marked by acute housing demand.[37]

At a meeting of Cork Corporation in December 1970, a report from the Housing Committee prompted discussion and concern among members regarding the administration of housing applications and the growing backlog on the Corporation's waiting lists. The report proposed that all housing applications more than two years old should be cancelled, a recommendation intended to address the accumulation of outdated or inactive cases. This suggestion, however, also immediately gave rise to questions from councillors about its practical implications for applicants. Mr. T. J. O'Sullivan sought clarification on whether individuals who had been on the waiting list for more than two years would be required to submit entirely new applications, and whether their original place in the queue would effectively be lost. Responding to these concerns, Alderman Stephen Barrett, chairman of the Housing Committee, explained that the proposal was not intended to disadvantage applicants but rather to ensure that the list accurately reflected current demand. He noted that many individuals who had applied several years earlier might no longer be in a position to accept a house, and that the two-year threshold had been

[37] *Evening Echo 22/5/1970*

selected as a reasonable period after which applications should be reviewed. Barrett emphasised that, in cases where applicants were required to reapply, the time they had already spent on the waiting list would not be disregarded. Instead, their prior waiting period - whether two years or more - would be taken into account when assessing their eligibility and priority. The City Manager, Patrick Clayton, reinforced this explanation, stating that rather than being summarily removed, applicants would be invited to renew their applications after the two-year period. This process, he indicated, was designed to update records while preserving fairness, as the duration of an applicant's time on the list would still be recognised in subsequent consideration. The discussion illustrated the administrative challenges faced by local authorities in managing housing demand, as Cork Corporation sought to balance efficiency in record-keeping with fairness to long-waiting applicants.[38]

A newspaper analysis from February 1971 on the housing situation during this time outlined how, by the late 1960s, Cork Corporation's housing policy had developed into an ambitious and financially complex programme, the scale of which raised increasingly urgent questions about cost, subsidy, and the burden ultimately borne by the ratepayer. While the physical expansion of municipal housing was widely acknowledged, closer examination of the city Corporation's five-year plan had revealed the substantial economic commitments required to sustain it, and the growing tension between social provision and local taxation. In October 1967, the then City Manager outlined the projected capital requirements for housing development up to March 1972. The total estimated outlay amounted to £11.8 million, comprising £9 million for local authority housing construction, £2.5 million for house purchase loans, and £300,000 for supplementary grants. On the basis of 2,741 dwellings to be provided over the period, and assuming an average construction cost of £3,000 per house, the financial implications were considerable. Even allowing for rents, State subsidies, and assumed loan contributions, each

[38] *Evening Echo 9/12/1970*

dwelling was estimated to generate an average annual shortfall of £159. Collectively, this represented a projected annual charge on the rates of £226,289 by 1972, with £148,454 expected in the earlier financial year. These projections were not theoretical alone. Examining actual accounts from preceding years demonstrated a clear upward trajectory in net housing expenditure. In 1967–68, net costs stood at £102,282; by 1968–69 this had risen to £145,711, and in 1969–70 to £162,586. By 1970–71, expenditure had escalated further to £329,192, against income of £1,267,666 from a total spend of £1,587,858. This represented a contribution of over 12 shillings in the pound of the municipal rate, within an overall city rate of 114 shillings and sixpence. Such figures led increasingly to the conclusion that Cork ratepayers were bearing a rapidly expanding share of housing provision costs. Within a few years, their contribution had effectively doubled, and was projected to continue rising as the five-year programme progressed towards completion. The implications for future municipal finance were therefore both immediate and long-term.

At the heart of the system lay the differential rent model, under which tenants' payments were calculated according to household income, family size, and other allowances. This produced a sliding scale in which rents could vary significantly, with a theoretical maximum equivalent to economic rent - up to £8 per week for a modern four-bedroom, centrally heated dwelling. In practice, however, few tenants reached the upper limits of this scale. The result was a structural gap between income received and the true cost of provision, a gap filled by State subsidy and local taxation. The principle of economic rent was defined as the level required to repay capital and interest over time. Any shortfall between this and the tenant's contribution was effectively underwritten by the public purse. Thus, while Corporation tenants also contributed through rates, the valuations applied to municipal housing were generally lower than those applied to comparable private dwellings, further widening the differential. It was noted how the origins of municipal housing in the City of Cork extended back to the nineteenth century. The earliest scheme, at

Madden's Buildings in Blackpool in 1886, comprised 76 houses built at a total cost of £6,500, initially let at 2 shillings and 8 pence per week. By modern standards, these rents had risen substantially, with the same properties later commanding between 7 shillings and 10½ shillings, and in some cases higher under differential assessment. Cork City also played a pioneering role in housing administration. In the interwar period, under the leadership of City Manager Philip Monahan, the Corporation introduced the differential rent system - an innovation that became widely adopted in Ireland and later in Britain. Under this model, rent was generally calculated as approximately one-sixth of net household income, adjusted for dependants. By the late 1960s, over 90 per cent of tenants were assessed under this system, including all new lettings.

A major revision of rents introduced in the mid-1960s provoked significant public reaction. The adjustment, which phased in modest weekly increases and transferred a greater share of rates responsibility to tenants, led to a five-week non-payment campaign in parts of the city. Although initially disruptive, the dispute was eventually resolved, and a second phase of revisions was scheduled for implementation, albeit delayed by administrative changes including the introduction of decimal currency. Comparative analysis of housing provision also further illustrated the financial structure underpinning municipal policy. For example, a tenant earning £24 per week and housed by the Corporation might pay approximately £3 9s in rent and £1 4s 2d in rates, totalling £4 13s 2d weekly. By contrast, a comparable household purchasing a private home with State assistance could face weekly repayments exceeding £5 6s, in addition to rates, deposits, insurance, and maintenance costs. In such comparisons, municipal housing clearly provided a substantial implicit subsidy. Maintenance and repair costs added further weight to the Corporation's liabilities. In one year alone, expenditure exceeded £226,000, a figure borne not by tenants but by the local authority. National policy developments during the 1960s encouraged tenant purchase schemes in an effort to reduce this long-term burden and promote owner occupation. Cork had in fact been an early

innovator in this field, with schemes dating back to Capwell in 1928 and earlier experiments in the 1920s and 1930s. These developments allowed tenants to purchase homes on long-term repayment plans, often at favourable ground rents.

Despite early successes, later attempts to revive large-scale tenant purchase schemes met with limited response. A mid-1960s initiative involving over 6,800 Corporation houses attracted only minimal uptake, and subsequent pricing disputes between the Corporation and the Department of Local Government left the scheme unresolved. Taken together, these developments illustrate the evolving complexity of Cork City's housing policy during the mid-twentieth century. What began as a programme of slum clearance and city/municipal provision had become a sophisticated but financially strained system, balancing social objectives with rising capital costs. By the early 1970s, the central question was no longer simply how many houses could be built, but how the continuing cost of provision could be sustained without placing an ever-greater burden on the city's ratepayers.[39]

As outlined by the '*Cork Examiner*' in October 1971, a tense and protracted rent dispute in Cork City reached a critical point when an attempt at mediation by a local clergyman failed, and the conflict appeared set to widen rather than resolve. After seventeen weeks of industrial-style action by tenants on the city's housing estates, a proposal for compromise was put forward by the Rev. Robert Ormond, Curate of the Church of the Assumption in Ballyphehane. In correspondence addressed to both the City Manager and the Cork Corporation Tenants Association, he suggested that the two sides enter discussions without preconditions, and that negotiations be chaired by an independent figure acceptable to all parties. The City Manager, Mr Patrick Clayton, responded positively in principle, indicating that the Corporation was willing to engage on the basis outlined. However, this opening was not matched by the tenants' representatives. A spokesman for the Tenants Association

[39] *Evening Echo 25/2/1971*

confirmed that their executive had refused to enter talks unless three core demands were first conceded: the right of succession to tenancies at existing rents, the transfer of tenancies without rent increases, and an assurance that no further rent increases would be imposed. Only once these conditions were met, the association stated, would they be prepared to discuss broader issues such as differential rents and rates. The tenants' position remained firm. The spokesman pointed to lengthy prior discussions - stretching back eighteen months - between the Corporation and the association before the strike began, and emphasised that any renewed negotiations would still be subject to ratification by the Minister for Local Government. The strike, he warned, would continue until all demands had been formally signed and approved.

Far from easing, the dispute was also threatened with expansion. Initially concentrated on the south side of the city, the action was declared likely to extend to the north side, with areas such as Mayfield expected to join in the near future. The tenants' representative reiterated that the campaign would continue to escalate until their objectives were secured. Meanwhile, the City Manager issued a stark warning to tenants regarding the financial consequences of continued non-payment of rent. In a letter circulated to households, he highlighted the impact of a previous strike the year before, during which between £8,000 and £10,000 had remained unrecovered. If such sums were not repaid, he cautioned, they would ultimately fall on the general rates. He further warned that the current dispute was already generating additional losses which would increase the longer it continued. Mr Clayton also criticised the basis of the industrial action, arguing that the issues cited by the Tenants Association concerned only a minority of tenants and did not justify widespread disruption. He described the decision to strike as having been taken by a small group at a meeting of a few hundred people, set against a backdrop of approximately 50,000 tenants across the city Corporation's housing estates. In his view, this represented an imbalance in which an occurrence of "the tail wagging the dog" had resulted in disproportionate disruption. He further claimed

that support for the strike was diminishing, citing figures which indicated that increasing numbers of tenants were resuming rent payments. In the two weeks ending 18 September, he stated, 169 people had returned to paying their rents. To underline the financial pressures on the housing system, the City Manager set out the structure of rents and expenditure. Across roughly 10,000 houses, weekly rents ranged from 10½ shillings up to an economic maximum of £8 in newer properties. He detailed the substantial costs borne by the Corporation, including over £1.3 million in loan charges and more than £321,000 in housing expenditure in the current year. Against this, rental income amounted to £804,237, supplemented by £467,000 in State subsidies, leaving a shortfall of £350,246 to be met by local ratepayers - equivalent to 64½ pence in the pound of valuation. As the correspondence made clear, both sides remained entrenched: the Corporation warning of escalating financial strain and service pressures, and the tenants insisting that only prior concession of their core demands would bring them to the negotiating table. The prospect of a swift resolution appeared increasingly remote as the dispute deepened and threatened to spread further across the city.[40]

In the 1970s, as Cork City continued to expand and modern housing schemes reshaped its suburban landscape, civic leaders turned their attention to the provision of public amenities. It was in this context that plans emerged in August 1972 for the creation of a new public park in the Glasheen area, intended to serve the growing communities of the Togher and Ardmorning Beg housing estates. The proposed development would come to be known as Clashduv Park. At a meeting of Cork Corporation, members considered a recommendation from the Roads, Traffic and Planning Committee regarding the future of a tract of open land situated between these two housing schemes. Reports prepared by the City Engineer and the City Architect outlined several possible uses for the site, reflecting both ambition and caution in municipal planning. The City Engineer, Mr. Seán McCarthy BE, presented three principal options for

[40] *Cork Examiner 2/10/1971*

development. The first proposed the construction of a football pitch. However, this plan posed significant practical and financial challenges. The low-lying nature of the land meant that approximately 90,000 cubic yards of fill would be required to raise the ground to a suitable level, at an estimated cost of £90,000. When combined with additional expenses for topsoil, levelling, cultivation, seeding, and the construction of essential facilities such as dressing rooms and toilets, the total projected cost rose to £115,000 - an outlay considered substantial for the provision of a single playing field. A second proposal suggested transforming the area into an artificial lake, which could be achieved at a considerably lower estimated cost of £30,000. Despite its relative affordability, concerns were raised about safety and the potential hazards associated with such a feature. The third option, and the one viewed most favourably, was the development of a sunken ornamental garden. This approach required significantly less infill and avoided the risks posed by open water, offering a more practical and aesthetically appealing solution for the site.

Before committing to any one plan, however, the City Engineer advised that further investigation was necessary. He recommended the clearance of vegetation from the low-lying ground and the reopening of natural drainage channels leading to the Glasheen River. These preliminary works, estimated to cost £1,000, were seen as essential to understanding the site's conditions and determining the most cost-effective and suitable form of development. The Corporation accepted this recommendation and approved the allocation of funds for the initial investigations. This decision marked the first concrete step in the transformation of the Glasheen open space into what would eventually become Clashduv Park, reflecting a measured and pragmatic approach to urban planning in urban Cork during this period.[41]

It is apparent that, during this period, there were mounting concerns over housing standards and administrative practices

[41] *Cork Examiner 15/8/1972*

became an increasingly prominent feature of local political discourse. In March 1973, these issues were brought into sharp focus at a meeting of the South-East Constituency Council of the Labour Party, where delegates discussed the findings of an ongoing survey into conditions in the N.B.A. housing scheme at Togher. Reporting on behalf of the local Togher branch, Mr. Jerry O'Sullivan outlined the origins of the survey. During a recent election campaign, residents of the Togher area had pressed candidates on the condition of their homes, prompting the Labour Party to undertake a detailed investigation. Although the survey had not yet been completed, its preliminary findings pointed to significant and widespread defects. Among the most serious complaints were reports of water ingress, with residents describing rainwater entering their homes, as well as concerns regarding fundamental flaws in the design of the houses. Particular criticism was directed at the unresolved status of the N.B.A. scheme. It was noted that Cork Corporation had not formally taken the estate in charge, despite continuing to collect rent from occupants. This situation was regarded by speakers as inconsistent and unjust, raising broader questions about accountability and responsibility in the provision of public housing.

Concerns extended beyond Togher to other parts of the city's southside. Mr. Kevin Hurley of the Lough branch drew attention to a growing number of housing estates that remained unadopted by the Corporation, even years after they were constructed. He cited Meadow Grove in Blackrock as a notable example, where residents had long expressed dissatisfaction with inadequate roads and services. While assurances had been given by officials that such issues would be addressed, frustration was voiced at the slow pace of progress. The meeting also examined aspects of tenancy policy. Mr. Frank Myers highlighted what he described as an inequity in the rules governing succession. In cases where individuals had lived for many years in a city Corporation house - often contributing to rent payments - these occupants could nevertheless be classified as new tenants following the death of the original leaseholder. This practice, he argued, failed to recognise the realities of family life and placed an

unfair burden on those who had effectively maintained the tenancy. Calls for stronger enforcement of building standards were also made. Mr. Seán Lyons, also a member of the Lough branch, argued that developers who failed to comply with planning regulations and bye-laws should face stricter penalties. He suggested that the Corporation itself could exert greater influence by refusing planning permission to builders with a record of non-compliance. The continued approval of such developers, he maintained, contributed to a cycle of poor construction and unresolved estates. The meeting also resolved that these concerns be formally communicated to the Minister for Local Government.[42]

Cork Corporation embarked on an ambitious effort to reshape patterns of housing tenure in the city, encouraging tenants of municipal dwellings to become homeowners. This initiative, formalised with the introduction of the Tenant Purchase Scheme in 1971, marked a significant shift in local authority policy and reflected broader social and economic changes in Ireland at the time. As reported in April 1973, the scheme was met with a strong and immediate response. When the Corporation announced that approximately 6,000 of its 10,000 houses and apartments would be made available for purchase, tenants responded in large numbers. Within two years, more than 1,500 applications had been received, of which some 700 had already been completed. Officials anticipated that the remaining applications would be processed within a matter of months, underscoring the popularity and momentum of the initiative.

However, the process of interviewing prospective purchasers at City Hall revealed a complication. A number of tenants expressed dissatisfaction with their existing homes, finding them unsuitable for purchase despite their interest in homeownership. In response, the Corporation moved to address this issue directly through the development of a new housing scheme at Tramore Road. Construction began approximately one year after the launch of the purchase scheme, resulting in a development of 58 houses. This

[42] *Evening Echo 31/3/1973*

project represented a notable departure from previous approaches: rather than building homes solely for rental, the Corporation intended to sell the entire scheme, giving priority to existing tenants. In doing so, it sought not only to facilitate ownership but also to promote greater social integration within the community. The houses themselves reflected evolving standards in public housing. Each was designed as a four-bedroom dwelling, and the financial arrangements were structured to make ownership accessible. With a gross price of £5,550, buyers could avail of a Government grant of £325, reducing the cost to £5,025. For those on lower incomes, a supplementary grant further reduced the price to £4,700. Purchasers were required to provide a deposit of £250, with the remaining balance financed through a long-term loan from the Corporation, repayable over 55 years. Weekly repayments were set at approximately £7.89, and the houses qualified for a substantial remission of local rates, making the scheme particularly attractive.

Public interest in the Tramore Road development was considerable, aided by the opening of show houses that illustrated the city Corporation's new approach to housing design and ownership. The scheme was widely seen as a progressive step, both in expanding access to homeownership and in fostering mixed communities. An additional feature of the programme reflected a continued concern for tenant welfare. In cases where a purchaser might fall ill and become unable to meet repayments, provisions were made for a return to tenant status. This safeguard illustrated the Corporation's intention to balance financial innovation with social responsibility. Taken together, the Tramore Road scheme exemplified a period of transition in Cork City's housing policy - one in which the local authority sought to combine practical solutions to demand with a broader vision of community development and stability.[43]

By January 1974, in the context of mounting pressure on Éire's housing programme, concerns began to grow at

[43] *Evening Echo 13/4/1973*

government level over the availability of essential building materials. The Minister for Local Government, James Tully, warned that existing shortages - already delaying the completion and handover of housing schemes - could deteriorate further if not carefully managed. This concern was formally communicated to Cork Corporation in a circular letter, in which the Minister cautioned contractors against the practice of stockpiling materials. While understandable in times of uncertainty, such behaviour, he argued, risked intensifying local shortages and disrupting supply chains even further. At the same time, the Minister acknowledged the practical realities facing builders in the city. Contractors who had secured housing projects were advised to place orders for key components - such as plumbing supplies and sanitary ware - immediately upon signing contracts. Where suppliers were unable to meet demand, the use of approved alternative materials was encouraged, with the Department offering guidance to local authorities on their suitability.

Oversight of the situation was being coordinated by An Foras Forbartha, working in conjunction with the Department of Local Government and representatives of the construction industry. Their role was to monitor the availability of critical materials and to anticipate emerging bottlenecks that could hinder progress on housing developments. Significantly, Tully also attributed the shortages in part to inadequate long-term planning within the public sector. He pointed to a need for greater investment in infrastructure and advocated for the adoption of new construction technologies that might reduce dependence on scarce traditional materials. In this vein, An Foras Forbartha, together with the National Building Agency, undertook a focused examination of alternatives to timber, one of the materials most affected by supply constraints. The findings of this investigation were to be communicated to local authorities, forming part of a broader effort to adapt building practices to the realities of constrained resources.

The episode highlighted the vulnerability of Ireland’s housing efforts to fluctuations in material supply, and underscored the importance of coordination, innovation, and

forward planning in sustaining construction activity during a period of high demand.[44]

Additionally, in the midst of growing concern over housing standards in Cork City, a public dispute emerged between former Lord Mayors regarding the future of a National Building Agency housing scheme in Togher. The controversy unfolded against a backdrop of recent storms and flooding, which had exposed defects in parts of the estate and intensified pressure on local authorities to act. One of the central voices in the debate, Councillor Seán O'Leary, argued that the Togher estate should be taken in charge immediately by Cork Corporation. He maintained that the development had already been inspected and deemed satisfactory two years earlier, and that there was no justification for delaying its formal takeover. Extending his concerns beyond Togher, he also called for a reassessment of the Corporation's approach to other National Building Agency estates in Mayfield and the Glen. This position was strongly contested by another former Lord Mayor, Councillor J. J. O'Sullivan. While he agreed that any damage caused by adverse weather should be addressed without delay, he rejected the claim that the estate had previously met the required standards. O'Sullivan emphasised that, for the preceding two years, Cork Corporation - including O'Leary himself - had been engaged in an ongoing dispute with the National Building Agency and its contractors over the quality of construction. According to O'Sullivan, this dissatisfaction had been formally expressed in meetings between Corporation members and representatives of the Agency, including its chairman. At a recent private session, assurances had been given - both directly and through the Minister for Local Government, James Tully - that any costs arising from defective workmanship or substandard materials would not fall upon the Corporation.

At the heart of the disagreement lay the question of responsibility. O'Sullivan warned that once a local authority assumed control of an estate, it would bear full responsibility

[44] *Irish Independent 15/1/1974*

for its maintenance and any outstanding defects. To accept the Togher scheme without first ensuring that it met agreed standards, he argued, would impose an unfair financial burden on local ratepayers rather than on those responsible for its construction. He went so far as to describe the housing scheme as a failure of contemporary building practices, criticising it as a poor reflection of modern architecture and engineering. Meanwhile, negotiations continued behind the scenes. Cork's Acting City Manager, Patrick Clayton, and City Engineer, Seán McCarthy, travelled to Dublin to meet with National Building Agency officials in an effort to resolve the issue of the estates' takeover. The dispute coincided with broader national attention on housing policy, as anticipation grew for the imminent publication of the Kenny Report, which was expected to address the escalating cost of building land and its implications for development across Éire.[45]

Decisive steps were subsequently taken to address long-standing defects in system-built estates at Togher, Mayfield, and The Glen. These developments, constructed under the auspices of the National Building Agency, had become the focus of widespread criticism from residents, many of whom had endured persistent problems such as dampness, condensation, and inadequate ventilation. In response to these concerns, the Agency began implementing remedial works, much to the relief of affected tenants. Efforts were directed at correcting structural issues, including the so-called "cold bridge" effect - an insulation flaw that contributed to heat loss and moisture build-up - as well as installing improved window fittings designed to allow controlled ventilation within the homes. At government level, the Minister for Local Government, James Tully, emphasised the urgency of addressing the situation. His stated priority was the immediate correction of all known defects, and he urged Cork Corporation to proceed with taking over the Togher section of the housing scheme. At the same time, he reaffirmed earlier assurances that the National Building Agency would remain responsible for completing any

[45] *Cork Examiner 19/1/1974*

outstanding works required under its contractual obligations. Despite this, members of Cork Corporation expressed caution about assuming control of the estate at such a stage. The City Engineer, Seán McCarthy, recommended that a comprehensive survey be conducted to assess the full extent of the repairs necessary to bring the houses up to an acceptable standard. This view was supported by the City Manager, Patrick Clayton, who advocated that the findings of such a report be carefully reviewed at a dedicated meeting involving both departmental and municipal officials in Dublin.

The urgency of the issue was underscored by ongoing tenant unrest. Residents in the affected estates had initiated a rent and rates strike in protest at the conditions, drawing national attention to their grievances. The schemes had already been the subject of two separate investigations commissioned by the Minister, the most recent carried out by the Institute for Industrial Research and Standards. In his communications with Cork Corporation, Tully also stressed the importance of establishing a robust and ongoing maintenance programme for the estates once they came under local authority control. Furthermore, he highlighted the need for a formal agreement between the Corporation and the National Building Agency to ensure that any additional defects - particularly those not yet identified, but potentially attributable to the Agency - would be properly investigated and rectified. By this stage, work on known defects for which contractors bore responsibility had either been completed or was actively underway. Nevertheless, the situation illustrated the broader challenges facing public housing policy in Ireland during the period, as questions of construction quality, accountability, and long-term maintenance came sharply into focus.[46]

In August 1975, in a proposal advanced within Cork Corporation during the development of a new Bishopstown housing scheme, Councillor V. W. O'Connell advocated for the inclusion of provision for future "granny flats" across approximately 170 new homes. He argued that the design

[46] *Irish Independent 19/2/1974*

represented an innovative approach to housing for older people in Ireland, aimed at enabling multi-generational living within the same neighbourhood. O'Connell's plan suggested that each new house be built with adjacent space - initially left as a garden, garage area, or open plot - which could later be converted into small self-contained accommodation units for elderly parents or surviving grandparents. This, he contended, would allow older family members to remain within their familiar community, while also maintaining independence. He presented the concept as a solution to what he described as the limited alternatives then available for elderly care: institutionalisation, remaining in unsuitable family homes, or relocation to segregated housing schemes for older people. By contrast, the "granny flat" model would, in his view, preserve dignity, autonomy, and family cohesion while keeping three generations in close proximity. O'Connell acknowledged that the approach would require more land per house at the outset but maintained that it would offer long-term social benefits by creating "balanced" communities of children, parents, and grandparents. He argued that such arrangements would reflect a natural social order and support ageing in place within familiar surroundings. The proposal was subsequently put forward for consideration by Cork Corporation, with Cllr. O'Connell expressing his intention to secure its adoption either within the Bishopstown development or in future municipal housing schemes.[47]

Cork Corporation, at a meeting in October that year, approved a revised layout for the housing development at Bishopstown House, submitted by the National Building Agency on 10 October, 1975, and also agreed to advertise the scheme for public tender and the EEC journal. The choice of the contractor was to be made by the Corporation on the advice of the N.B.A. following full consultation. There was no discussion on the matter at the meeting.[48]

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[47] *Evening Echo 13/8/1975*

[48] *Evening Echo 28/10/1975*

# *BREAKING GROUND*

During September 1976, work commenced on a major National Building Agency (N.B.A.) housing scheme on Curraheen Road, marking a significant expansion of Cork's suburban residential development. The project, with a contract value of £1,693,905, was awarded to Lakeglen Construction Ltd. of Dublin and was scheduled for completion within approximately 18 months. The scheme provided for 165 houses in total, consisting mainly of 138 three-bedroom units, alongside 16 four-bedroom and 11 two-bedroom homes. The dwellings were arranged in small groupings of six, four, and three houses, reflecting a planned estate layout intended to balance density with a suburban character. Designed by the N.B.A. and overseen on site by the Cork Corporation technical staff, the development incorporated a resident architect, engineer, and clerk of works to ensure continuous supervision. The houses were built in a traditional architectural style, featuring brick-faced exteriors and a strong emphasis on durability and appearance. Energy efficiency and heating were key considerations for the period: most homes included two fireplaces and a back boiler system, with insulation incorporated throughout. Each unit was also provided with rear access and front car parking spaces, reflecting increasing car ownership. The development occupied lands formerly associated with Bishopstown House and lay adjacent to the Two Pot River, which formed the boundary between city and county and separated the estate from University College Cork's (UCC) agricultural lands. As part of the scheme, the river was to be treated and deepened as a protective measure against flooding. Long-term planning for the area included the reservation of land behind the housing estate for recreational playing pitches, as well as a proposed site for a future school, indicating the intention to develop a broader community infrastructure alongside the residential units.[49]

By December 1976, a major step in Cork's ongoing urban renewal programme was marked at City Hall with the signing of the contract for the Boyce's Street housing scheme, valued at £408,440. The agreement, concluded

[49] *Evening Echo 24/9/1976*

between Cork Corporation and the contractors O'Sheas Ltd. of White Street, formally initiated one of the city's most ambitious redevelopment projects of the period. The scheme was notable for its strong social housing emphasis, with half of its planned accommodation specifically designed for elderly and disabled residents. Built on a 4½-acre site between Blarney Street, St. Anthony's Road, and west of Shandon Street, the development replaced one of inner-city Cork's most densely populated historic districts, formerly characterised by a network of narrow lanes climbing the steep slope from Blarney Street to Boyce's Street. The land, long under consideration by the Corporation, had ultimately been acquired through compulsory purchase in 1972.

The architectural planning incorporated both social and environmental considerations. The design included 52 dwellings in total, comprising specialist units for older and disabled residents, along with a mix of two-storey houses and multi-storey blocks containing flats and maisonettes. Attention was also given to the character of the site itself, with the planners retaining its elevated position and incorporating landscaped areas, including a small stepped garden intended as a communal green space. A key feature of the scheme was the inclusion of a purpose-built community centre, designed to serve residents' social and practical needs. It was intended to support services such as meals provision and recreational activities, reinforcing the development's aim of creating a self-contained and supportive neighbourhood for its future occupants. Completion was projected for the end of 1977, by which time the scheme was expected to be fully occupied. The contract signing was attended by civic leaders including the Lord Mayor - Councillor Seán French TD, along with senior municipal officials such as the City Manager and Town Clerk, T. J. McHugh, and Assistant Town Clerk M. Richmond, underscoring the civic significance of the project within the City of Cork's broader housing strategy.[50]

[50] *Cork Examiner 11/12/1976*

# *BREAKING GROUND*

In January 1977, ,Cork Corporation announced plans to complete 350 new houses over the course of the following year, with the principal development being the first phase of the Mahon housing scheme. According to City Manager Mr. McHugh, plans for the major development in the eastern suburbs were already at an advanced stage, and further details were to be disclosed at a press conference later that month. Construction also progressed on the N.B.A. housing scheme at Curraheen in the western suburbs, where foundations for the new houses had been laid. Many of the dwellings were expected to be completed by the end of May. In a series of five-year development reports issued by Cork Corporation, including a report on housing, it was outlined that the majority of new housing would be concentrated in Mahon, Curraheen, Model Farm Road, and Hollyhill in the north-western suburbs. The city Corporation projected the construction of 2,485 new houses over the subsequent five years. It was further noted that, beyond this period, available land for public housing in the north-western and western suburbs would largely be exhausted. Mahon, however, remained a significant area for future expansion, with the Corporation holding approximately 800 acres of land, including a substantial area designated for Phase Two development. The report also observed that in cities such as Cork, where housing demand remained persistently high, the most rapid and economical means of meeting this demand was through construction on serviced land, which was generally located in suburban areas.[51]

An opinion piece published by the '*Cork Examiner*' during June 1977 noted Cork Corporation's longstanding concern, shared by many modern urban authorities, over the movement of residents from city centres to suburban areas. While the social implications of declining inner-city populations were acknowledged, the article argued that the principal concern for local authorities had been the loss of rates revenue to county administrations as families relocated beyond city boundaries. The article observed that the abolition of domestic rates had fundamentally altered this

[51] *Evening Echo 4/1/1977*

situation. With local authorities no longer dependent on rates income from households, Irish cities would no longer experience direct financial losses when residents moved to suburban districts. Instead, it was suggested that cities might now regard departing residents as a reduction in financial obligations at a time when alternative funding sources remained uncertain. Against this background, the article considered Cork Corporation's decision not to introduce special parking allowances for city-centre residents. Reference was made to a resident undertaking a 24-hour hunger strike in protest at restrictions on residential parking, an action presented as evidence of the difficulties faced by those living in the city centre.

The piece argued that many residents effectively faced a choice between giving up private car ownership and relying on Córas Iompair Éireann (C.I.E.) public transport services, or leaving the city centre altogether. It further contended that, although the Corporation maintained that the law prevented discriminatory parking arrangements, there was scope within existing regulations to amend bye-laws in consultation with the Gardaí. Such measures, it suggested, could permit free or extended-duration parking for residents through the introduction of official identification discs displayed on vehicles. The article concluded by criticising what it described as inconsistent treatment by the Corporation, noting that free parking facilities were already being provided for Corporation staff at public expense.[52]

It was reported in August 1977 that pickets were maintained for a third consecutive day at the National Building Agency's local authority housing development at Curraheen, in the western area of Cork City. As a result of the unofficial dispute, all construction work on the scheme, which comprised 165 houses, was brought to a halt. A spokesperson for the workers stated that the stoppage arose following the dismissal of eight employees and their replacement by different workers brought from Belfast. However, a company

[52] *Cork Examiner 25/6/1977*

representative maintained that the dispute concerned matters between the workers and their union.[53]

In October 1977, Councillor Dave Buckley expressed dissatisfaction at a Cork Corporation meeting after reading a report from the Planning Committee stating that the City Manager had undertaken to investigate complaints regarding scrap dealers operating from a Corporation-owned site within the Knocknaheeny housing scheme. Cllr. Buckley remarked that no investigation was necessary, as the activity was openly visible to the public. He stated that a notice had been erected within the housing estate, advertising second-hand car parts for sale. He further noted that demands had already been made for action to be taken against the dealers and called upon the City Manager to report on the measures that would be undertaken in response to the matter.[54]

Cork City's direct labour building schemes attracted attention from councils elsewhere in Ireland seeking alternatives to private contracting. By January 1978, among those showing interest was the urban council in Drogheda, County Louth, whose members arranged a visit to Cork in early February to examine firsthand the operation and results of the city's direct labour housing developments. The two-day visit, scheduled for 7 and 8 February, was intended as both a fact-finding exercise and an opportunity for discussion with Cork Corporation officials responsible for the schemes in the city. Representatives hoped to gain practical insight into how Cork City had organised and managed the construction of local authority housing using directly employed labour rather than private building contractors. It was also anticipated that members of the local trades council would join the delegation. Their participation reflected the wider interest among trade unions and labour organisations in the potential of direct labour systems to provide more stable employment

[53] *Evening Echo 31/8/1977*

[54] *Evening Echo 25/10/1977*

conditions and greater public accountability in housing construction.[55]

In March of 1978, industrial tensions in Cork's building sector came sharply into public view when a representative body of eleven trade unions placed pickets on the Cork Corporation housing development at Curraheen Road. The dispute centred on a partially completed housing scheme where fifty newly allocated houses remained without electricity or gas connections, leaving prospective tenants unable to move into their homes. The houses formed part of a larger development of 165 dwellings being constructed for the National Building Agency by Lakeglen Construction, a Dublin-based firm headquartered on Upper Leeson Street. The contract, valued at approximately £1.6 million, had initially been regarded as a significant addition to Cork's growing housing stock. However, work on the site came to an abrupt halt on 10 March, and three days later the High Court in Dublin appointed a provisional liquidator to the company amid reports that its liabilities exceeded £1.5 million. The collapse of the contractor left workers unpaid and the future of the scheme uncertain. According to the Cork Building Group of Trade Unions, some work had continued on the site after the liquidation using labour "other than trade union members", a development that deepened tensions between the unions, the National Building Agency, and Cork Corporation.

Brendan O'Neill, secretary of the Cork Building Group of Trade Unions, acknowledged that the pickets would likely anger families waiting to move into their homes, but insisted the unions were acting to ensure fair treatment for both workers and future tenants. The unions maintained that the situation surrounding both the National Building Agency and Lakeglen Construction required urgent investigation by Cork Corporation. The union group declared its willingness to complete the housing scheme, but only if several conditions were met. These included a formal inquiry into the operations of both the National Building Agency and

[55] *Drogheda Independent 13/1/1977*

Lakeglen Construction, the transfer of the site to direct labour control, compensation for lost wages and unpaid holiday pay owed to employees, and guarantees that the original workforce would be rehired to finish the project. At the centre of the dispute were the eighty-five workers formerly employed on the site, many of whom were reportedly owed sums ranging from £100 to £260. A meeting was organised at Connolly Hall to brief the workers on developments and discuss the next steps in the campaign. Union representatives also pressed the National Building Agency to assume responsibility for the completion of the entire development, including roads and pathways, rather than limiting intervention to the fifty houses nearest completion. According to O'Neill, the agency responded that the matter rested with the liquidator. The unions feared that unless swift action was taken, the unfinished houses would deteriorate and be abandoned before completion. The Curraheen Road dispute became emblematic of the wider economic and industrial instability affecting Ireland's construction sector during the period, where ambitious public housing projects could quickly become entangled in financial collapse, labour disputes, and administrative deadlock.[56]

By May 1978, many elderly people in Cork City during the period, old age was marked not by comfort or security, but by damp lodgings, poor heating, and social isolation. Against this backdrop, the efforts of the schoolboy charitable organisation SHARE emerged as one of the city's most remarkable voluntary movements, transforming the living conditions of dozens of older residents through a series of ambitious housing projects. One of the beneficiaries was eighty-two-year-old Nellie Ballard, who spoke with joy as she settled into her new three-room home at Rope Walk, off Sunday's Well. Less than a mile away stood the dark and damp room she had previously rented for twenty-nine shillings a week, where rain reportedly leaked through the roof. Without the intervention of SHARE, such conditions would likely have remained her reality. The new development at Rope Walk, officially opened by the Lord

[56] *Cork Examiner 31/3/1978*

Mayor of Cork, Councillor G. Y. Goldberg, marked the fifth major project undertaken by the organisation. Known as "Skellig", the scheme consisted of seven single-storey houses overlooking the Mardyke and the nearby lake. Together with an earlier project at Sheares Street known as "Ard Mhaca", which included eleven flats and a laundry facility providing a free weekly service for approximately two hundred elderly residents, SHARE had by then provided and fully furnished forty-three homes for older people in Cork city.

The achievements were all the more extraordinary because the organisation itself was led by students. Under the direction of fifth-year pupils from Presentation College, SHARE had raised and spent more than £85,000 on housing and welfare projects for the elderly. Their work relied not only on fundraising and voluntary labour, but also on cooperation with Cork Corporation, which donated, prepared, landscaped, and serviced the Rope Walk site free of charge. The conditions endured by many of those rehoused highlighted the severity of urban poverty among older people at the time. SHARE volunteers recalled assisting an elderly man suffering from arthritis who had spent years living alone in a fourth-floor room without electricity or running water. To keep dry at night, he reportedly wedged coal between the bed frame and mattress, while dampness had turned his shoes green. The Rope Walk development itself cost more than £30,000 and was regarded as one of the organisation's most successful undertakings. One of the houses was named "Ballymartle" in recognition of the support and fundraising efforts of Ballymartle Macra na Tuaithe, illustrating the wide community involvement that SHARE's work inspired throughout Cork.

Public figures praised the initiative in unusually strong terms. Lord Mayor Goldberg described the schoolboys' work as a "wonderful example and tremendous initiative" whose contribution to the city "could never be praised sufficiently." He remarked that the homes had been "tastefully designed and erected with loving care" for elderly citizens who were especially deserving of dignity and comfort in later life. Pearse Wyse TD, Minister of State for Finance, also paid

tribute to the students' efforts, noting the growing importance of services for older people in an ageing population. He emphasised the value of voluntary community action working alongside public services provided by health boards and local authorities. According to Wyse, the widespread support given to SHARE by Cork Corporation, the Southern Health Board, and the public demonstrated that Cork possessed "a caring community in the truest sense of the term."

The scheme was blessed by Rev. Fr. J. O'Kelly of Sunday's Well, who expressed hope that the example set by the SHARE boys would inspire broader public awareness of the needs of the elderly and encourage greater compassion within the community. SHARE chairman Jeremiah O'Sullivan described the homes as being built to a standard "befitting the dignity of the human person", intended to allow senior citizens to "grow old gracefully" in secure and pleasant surroundings. For Nellie Ballard, however, the significance of the project was simpler and more personal. Standing proudly in her new home, she declared it "the happiest day of my life." Her pension, she said, left her with little money to spare, "but I don't mind anymore," especially after being told that a television set would soon arrive in her new sitting room.[57]

It is also important to note that, by the late 1970s, Cork Corporation was facing mounting criticism over the pace of local authority house building, as city councillors warned that labour shortages, administrative delays, and broader difficulties within the construction industry were undermining efforts to meet growing housing demand across the city. At a contentious meeting of the city Corporation during October 1978, councillors voiced concern that the number of housing completions had fallen far behind target. Councillor Paul Black noted that by that stage of the year the Corporation had expected approximately 350 housing completions, yet only around 160 had been achieved. Even allowing for delays associated with the troubled National

[57] *Cork Examiner 2/5/1978*

Building Agency scheme at Curraheen, he argued that the city still faced a shortfall of between fifty and sixty houses. One of the principal difficulties identified was an apparent shortage of skilled tradesmen. Cork's Assistant City Manager was asked to notify training bodies of the growing problem in the hope that additional apprentices and workers could be recruited into the building trades. Black described the inability to secure sufficient tradesmen as "outrageous" in 1978 and proposed that a deputation from the Council meet the Minister to press for action. Other councillors pointed to contrasting experiences elsewhere. Councillor Mrs. Aherne remarked that work on housing developments in Mallow was progressing satisfactorily, while Councillor Micheál Finn suggested that members of the Corporation should visit the site themselves to observe the differences in progress. Debate also turned to broader staffing issues within the Corporation. Councillor Jim Corr requested figures on staff turnover, arguing that if workers were leaving because Corporation wages adhered strictly to national pay agreements, the matter would require urgent attention.

The discussion revealed wider frustrations over Cork's housing performance. Councillor Tom Brosnan criticised the Corporation's record in house building, noting that despite significant housing need, the authority had repeatedly failed to spend its full housing allocation. He also argued that private builders were increasingly reluctant to work on local authority schemes and renewed an earlier proposal that the Corporation purchase completed or partially completed private housing developments where possible. Existing regulations, he had previously been told, prevented such purchases, but he urged officials to reconsider the matter, warning that otherwise the city would never achieve its building targets. Concerns were also raised about communication and transparency within the Corporation itself. Councillor Toddy O'Sullivan complained that reports circulated to councillors made little reference to the shortage of tradesmen, despite the issue having been discussed extensively within the housing committee. Deputy Pat Kerrigan criticised an official report titled "Housing Progress", describing the title as misleading given the scale

of the delays and shortcomings being debated. Alongside labour shortages and construction delays, councillors also discussed the growing problem of vandalism on housing sites throughout the city. Particular attention focused on the Boyce's Street housing development, one of the Corporation's most ambitious urban renewal projects at the time. Despite vandalism and construction difficulties, the scheme was nearing completion, with some houses expected to be handed over for occupation within weeks.

The Boyce's Street development consisted of fifty-four dwellings built on a steep and challenging site in one of Cork's oldest districts. The scheme included sixteen three-bedroom maisonettes, eight two-bedroom flats, and twenty-four cottages designed specifically for elderly couples. Four of the dwellings incorporated special features for wheelchair users, reflecting an increasing awareness of accessibility and the needs of disabled residents in public housing design. Architecturally, the development represented a notable departure from earlier Corporation schemes. Three blocks combined ground-floor flats with first- and second-floor maisonettes, each possessing separate private entrances. The project also included a community centre intended to support social activities and services such as meals-on-wheels for elderly residents. Corporation officials expressed hope that landscaping and planting would improve the appearance of the development once trees and shrubs supplied by the Parks Department became established. The intention was to create not merely housing, but a more complete community environment for residents. The debate illustrated the growing pressures confronting local authorities across Ireland during the period: rising housing demand, labour shortages in the construction industry, difficulties securing contractor participation, and the challenge of maintaining urban housing schemes amid vandalism and financial constraints. While councillors differed over solutions, there was broad agreement that Cork City's housing programme was failing to keep pace with the city's needs.[58]

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[58] *Evening Echo 10/10/1978*

# *BREAKING GROUND*

By April 1979, Cork Corporation sought to address long-standing criticism of its approach to urban expansion and public housing. Earlier developments in the city had often been accused of lacking coordinated planning for housing, employment, recreation, and public services. In response, the Corporation unveiled an ambitious £20 million development plan for the Knocknaheeny–Hollyhill area on the north-western edge of Cork city. The project represented one of the most comprehensive urban planning schemes undertaken by the local authority at the time, combining residential construction with industrial zoning, educational facilities, healthcare services, transport planning, and recreational amenities. Construction progressed rapidly during the early phases of the scheme. Both local authority and private housing developments were advanced, alongside specialised accommodation for residents associated with the Cork Polio and General After Care Association. Industrial development also formed a central component of the project, with almost thirty acres reserved for factories and employment-generating enterprises. Several factories were already operational during the initial stages of development, reflecting a deliberate policy of locating employment opportunities close to residential communities. The city Corporation presented the scheme as a model of integrated urban planning. Assistant City Manager Jack Higgins described the project as a "comprehensive development" intended to ensure that residents would have opportunities for work and recreation within close proximity to their homes. The development reflected broader European planning trends of the period, particularly the belief that modern housing estates should function as self-contained communities rather than isolated dormitory suburbs. The Knocknaheeny scheme consisted of approximately 600 local authority houses, predominantly three-bedroom homes, with a smaller number of four-bedroom and two-bedroom units. The adjoining Hollyhill development provided 300 municipal dwellings together with land for approximately 300 private houses. A notable feature of the project was the effort to encourage a mixed community through the inclusion of privately built housing alongside Corporation-built homes. Individual private sites were allocated to householders

intending to construct their own houses, while additional plots were sold to private developers.

The Hollyhill plan incorporated extensive community infrastructure. Land was reserved for a shopping centre, community centre, church, schools, health clinic, reservoirs, and specialised housing units. Recreational provision also formed a key part of the scheme, with space allocated for playing fields, a public park, and a pitch-and-putt course. Open spaces throughout the estate were landscaped with topsoil, grass, trees, and shrubs by the Corporation's parks department, while smaller green areas were developed as "tiny tot lots" equipped with swings and playground facilities for younger children. One of the most innovative aspects of the Knocknaheeny project was its adoption of the Radburn planning principle, an urban design concept developed in the United States during the 1920s. Under this model, vehicular access was generally confined to the rear of houses, allowing pedestrians and children to move more safely through landscaped communal spaces separated from traffic. This was the first large-scale housing development in Cork designed along these lines. The Corporation believed that the separation of pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles would improve safety and encourage greater use of public open spaces by children and families. In Hollyhill, planners placed greater emphasis on the road network and traffic management. While the estate moved away from the dense block-style layouts that characterised parts of Knocknaheeny, houses continued to be arranged in clusters around courtyards and open spaces. Rear vehicular access remained a central feature of the design, intended to reduce traffic hazards and facilitate the efficient movement of commuters and public service vehicles along major routes such as Harbour View Road and Kilmore Road. City Architect Tony McNamara argued that these design choices would contribute to safer living conditions, particularly for children. The project also reflected contemporary social policy priorities. Special housing complexes were constructed to accommodate small groups of residents under supervised care arrangements, while religious and healthcare facilities were incorporated into the wider community plan.

Corporation officials acknowledged the difficulty of achieving a socially balanced population mix but maintained that the inclusion of private housing, municipal housing, and specialised accommodation represented a significant attempt to create a more integrated community.

By the time the development was underway, Cork Corporation had effectively exhausted the remaining land available for housing construction within the north-western boundary of the city. The Knocknaheeny–Hollyhill scheme therefore marked both the culmination of a major phase of municipal expansion and an important experiment in post-war urban planning in Ireland. Conceived by City Architect Tony McNamara and developed in collaboration with City Engineer Seán McCarthy, Planning Officer John O'Donnell, and their respective departments, the project illustrated the growing ambition of Irish local authorities during the mid-to-late twentieth century to create several planned suburban communities that combined housing, employment, public services, and recreation within a unified urban vision.[59]

It was evident, however, by August of that year that Cork Corporation faced increasing financial pressures arising from widespread rent arrears within its public housing system. As local authorities across Ireland struggled to maintain expanding housing estates and rising maintenance costs, municipal officials in Cork adopted increasingly strict measures against tenants who had fallen behind on rent payments. At one meeting of Cork Corporation, councillors were informed that the tenancies of 178 Corporation houses were to be terminated and notices to quit issued to occupants. The notices were to be served by registered post, and where tenants failed to surrender possession of the properties, legal proceedings would be initiated to recover the houses. Additional possession orders were also issued for houses at Rathpeacon Road, Aherlow, and Connolly Road, reflecting the scale of the Corporation's campaign to tackle non-payment of rent. The debate highlighted growing concern within City Hall regarding arrears in newly constructed

[59] *Evening Echo 4/4/1979*

housing schemes. Councillors were informed that some tenants in the recently developed N.B.A. housing estate at Curraheen had already fallen into arrears despite the scheme not yet being fully completed. The situation was viewed by officials as evidence of a worsening culture of non-payment that threatened the financial sustainability of municipal housing provision.

At the time, total rent arrears owed to Cork Corporation had risen to £385,454, a substantial figure for the period. Of this amount, former tenants accounted for more than £59,000, leaving over £326,000 owed by current tenants. City Manager T. J. McHugh told councillors that a relatively small minority of tenants were responsible for particularly large debts, though he also noted that the national postal strike had disrupted the Corporation's ability to issue summonses and notices to quit efficiently. Corporation management insisted that stronger enforcement measures were necessary. McHugh informed the meeting that the local authority intended to apply "maximum pressure" to reduce arrears and stressed that tenants had to recognise their responsibility to pay rent. The measures reflected a broader shift in local authority policy during the period, as councils increasingly adopted stricter administrative and legal approaches to rent collection in response to mounting financial pressures. The proposed evictions generated some political unease within the council chamber. Councillor Ted Tynan called for further discussion before any tenants were removed from their homes, reflecting concerns among some elected representatives about the social consequences of eviction and the treatment of vulnerable households. However, city councillors were reminded that the measures before the meeting were Manager's Orders and therefore administrative decisions rather than matters for immediate political debate. Tynan was advised that the issue could instead be raised at a subsequent meeting of the housing committee. The controversy illustrated the tensions that emerged within Irish public housing policy during the period. While local authorities had invested heavily in large-scale housing construction during previous decades, rising arrears, unemployment, and economic difficulties increasingly placed strain on the

system. City councils were therefore caught between their role as providers of social housing and their need to maintain financial viability, leading to what were, in practice, more aggressive rent enforcement policies that often proved politically contentious.[60]

Large municipal housing schemes in Cork City were also facing growing problems associated with maintenance, infrastructure, and environmental conditions. While extensive public housing programmes had succeeded in rehousing thousands of families during earlier decades, some estates increasingly suffered from inadequate upkeep and design shortcomings that became more apparent as the buildings aged. Conditions in sections of the N.B.A. Housing Scheme at Togher illustrated many of the difficulties experienced by residents in urban local authority housing during this period. In the Owenacurra Court and Shournagh Lawn sections of the estate, residents complained of serious rat infestations and inadequate heating facilities. Families living in the upper floors of Owenacurra Court reported hearing rats moving through ceilings and wall spaces during the night, causing distress and anxiety among tenants. The lower floors of the complex were occupied largely by elderly residents, some living alone, heightening concerns about health and safety within the development. Residents repeatedly sought assistance from Cork Corporation, arguing that the infestation stemmed from structural defects within the complex. Officials suggested that rats may have been entering through piping systems connected to water or heating infrastructure, although the precise source was not identified. Corporation sanitary staff carried out pest control measures, including the laying of poison, but tenants claimed that the problem soon returned. Complaints from residents suggested a broader frustration with what they perceived as inadequate follow-up and slow official responses to persistent maintenance issues. The rat infestation highlighted wider concerns about the construction and management of some local authority housing schemes. Questions were raised regarding communal storage areas and outhouses located

[60] *Evening Echo 28/8/1979*

near the homes, though many residents insisted that these facilities were well maintained and could not fully explain the scale of the problem. Reports that clothing stored in hot presses had been damaged by rodents further intensified fears about hygiene and living conditions within the estate.

At the same time, residents criticised the estate's heating system, which they regarded as both expensive and ineffective. Tenants were charged approximately £156 annually for communal heating, yet the system operated only for limited evening hours. Many households argued that the restricted heating schedule was wholly inadequate, particularly during winter months. Residents also complained about excessive noise generated when the heating system was in operation, adding to dissatisfaction with the estate's infrastructure. The difficulties experienced in the Togher area had reflected broader challenges facing public housing developments in Ireland during the period. Large-scale estates built in the post-war decades were increasingly encountering problems linked to maintenance costs, ageing infrastructure, and changing social conditions. Although local authorities had originally promoted such schemes as modern and progressive housing solutions, residents frequently found themselves campaigning for basic improvements in sanitation, heating, and environmental quality. These disputes also revealed the growing assertiveness of tenant communities during the late twentieth century. Residents increasingly organised collectively, engaged with local media, and lobbied municipal authorities in an effort to secure improvements to living conditions. Their complaints formed part of a wider national conversation about the quality of public housing and the responsibilities of local authorities to maintain the estates they had constructed during earlier decades of rapid urban expansion.[61]

By the turn of the 1980s, the city became increasingly preoccupied with the problem of wandering horses in and around the city's large suburban housing estates. The issue generated intense public debate and exposed wider tensions

[61] *Evening Echo 5/12/1979*

surrounding urban management, public safety, Traveller accommodation policy, and relations between settled and itinerant communities. Discussions within the council chamber revealed both the frustration of local representatives and the difficulties faced by local authorities attempting to regulate the problem within outdated legal frameworks. At one particularly heated meeting of Cork Corporation, councillors agreed to seek substantial increases in pound fees for impounded horses and to request new powers allowing the confiscation and sale of animals repeatedly found roaming the city. The Council also called for separate fee structures for urban and rural areas and urged the Government to update the Summary Jurisdiction Act of 1851, which officials regarded as inadequate for dealing with modern urban conditions. In a closely divided vote, councillors additionally supported a proposal that local authorities be granted powers to humanely destroy impounded horses, whether claimed by owners or not. The debate reflected growing public concern over the presence of horses wandering through housing estates, roads, parks, and city streets. Councillor Brian Bermingham argued that anti-Traveller sentiment was increasing because of the issue and warned that efforts to support rehousing and settlement programmes for itinerant families were being undermined by public anger. He described the danger posed by loose horses to residents and motorists, as well as the extensive damage caused to public property and playing fields.

Several councillors referred specifically to conditions in areas such as Knocknaheeny, Blackrock, and Bishopstown, where residents frequently complained about horses grazing on public land, damaging recreational facilities, and obstructing roads and footpaths. Councillor Dave Buckley stated that local residents were willing to identify horse owners but claimed that insufficient action had been taken against them. Although he expressed sympathy for itinerant families generally, he drew a distinction between settled Traveller communities and what he described as roadside traders operating illegally within the city. The discussion revealed the extent to which the horse issue had become intertwined with wider debates about urban space, law

enforcement, and social integration. Some councillors demanded drastic action. Councillor Denis Kiely proposed that local authorities should be empowered to destroy impounded horses, a proposal seconded by Councillor Bill Nolan after reports of horses wandering through the city centre during morning traffic. Other councillors, however, opposed such measures. Councillor S. O'Reilly warned that the destruction of horses would provoke public backlash from animal welfare advocates, while Councillor G. Y. Goldberg argued that the Corporation lacked the legislative authority to resolve the issue independently and should instead lobby central government for reform. Underlying the debate was frustration with the perceived ineffectiveness of existing enforcement mechanisms. Assistant City Manager Jack Higgins informed councillors that Corporation officials had repeatedly rounded up wandering horses, only for the animals to be reclaimed after payment of minimal fees. In some instances, he stated, the municipal pound itself had been broken into and impounded horses released. Higgins also referred to difficulties in enforcing court orders relating to the unlawful occupation of land near St Vincent's Field in Bishopstown, where horses were reportedly being kept and traded. The controversy highlighted broader tensions within Irish urban policy during the period. Large suburban housing estates built during earlier decades increasingly faced complex social and environmental challenges that local authorities often struggled to manage effectively. The debate over wandering horses also exposed strains in relations between settled residents and Traveller communities at a time when the State was attempting to expand halting sites and settlement schemes while simultaneously confronting widespread prejudice and social exclusion.[62]

As outlined in May 1980, rapid urban growth, continuing housing demand, and pressure on waiting lists led to an ambitious programme of construction across several suburban and inner-city locations. By this stage, local authority housing policy in Cork had evolved beyond the emergency provision of earlier decades into a broader effort

[62] *Evening Echo 29/1/1980*

to create planned communities with integrated services, infrastructure, and modern urban design. At one point during this period, a total of 681 local authority houses were under construction across Cork city. The Corporation had also approved additional schemes, including ninety houses at Rossa Avenue, while tenders were being sought for developments in areas such as Nicholas Place in the South Parish, Mahon, Sunview, Brogue Makers Hill, and St John's Square. Together, these projects represented hundreds of additional dwellings intended to address the city's persistent housing shortages. According to City Manager T. J. McHugh, the Corporation expected to complete more than 300 houses during the year, although further expansion depended heavily on funding allocations from the Department of the Environment. Cork Corporation had received £6.3 million in housing funding for the year, though officials warned that rising costs and existing commitments meant that additional financial support would be required if planned developments were to proceed at the desired pace. The dependence of local authorities on central government funding reflected the highly centralised nature of Irish housing policy during the period, with municipal construction programmes often constrained by national economic conditions and public expenditure limits. Much of the Corporation's attention focused on the continuing expansion of Hollyhill and Knocknaheeny in the north-west of the city. Originally conceived during the early 1970s as an integrated suburban community, Hollyhill increasingly came to be regarded as one of Cork's most ambitious planned housing developments. By the time new schemes such as the 49-house development at Coolmain Close and Kilkieran Close were completed, the area had evolved into what observers described as a town in its own right. The development of Hollyhill illustrated the changing philosophy of municipal planning in Ireland during the post-war decades. Housing estates were no longer intended simply as collections of houses but as fully functioning communities supported by schools, churches, shopping centres, recreational facilities, and employment opportunities. The area included a modern shopping centre, educational facilities, land reserved for sports grounds and community amenities, and industrial

development supported through land sales to the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), which established advance factories on nearby sites. Private housing was also encouraged through the allocation of building plots, reflecting efforts to create socially mixed suburban communities.

The pace of expansion was such that by this period very little undeveloped land remained within Cork city's northside boundary. Corporation officials acknowledged that most available land in Hollyhill had already been allocated, marking the near completion of one of the city's largest suburban expansion projects. At the same time, Cork Corporation also began experimenting with new forms of urban housing design. Among the more innovative projects was an infill scheme at Great William O'Brien Street consisting of three-storey townhouses built within an established inner-city area. The development represented the first scheme of its kind undertaken by the Corporation and reflected growing interest in higher-density urban housing as an alternative to large suburban estates. Designed as single-family homes with four bedrooms, the houses demonstrated a willingness to explore new architectural approaches suited to changing urban conditions. Elsewhere, further large-scale development continued at Mahon on the south side of the city, where a dedicated design team worked on long-term planning strategies for future phases of expansion. Mahon would later become one of Cork's major suburban districts, illustrating the continuing outward growth of the city during the later twentieth century.[63]

Speaking at the formal opening of a new development of 49 Corporation houses at Coolmain Close and Kilkieran Close in Hollyhill, during June 1980, Lord Mayor Jim Corr revealed that the average cost of constructing a housing unit in Cork city had reached approximately £24,000. The figure illustrated the significant escalation in building costs during the period and prompted calls within the Corporation for a reassessment of future housing design and planning

[63] *Evening Echo 23/5/1980*

strategies. While emphasising that he did not favour any reduction in construction standards or a return to the prefabricated housing methods used in earlier decades, the Lord Mayor argued that the Corporation had a responsibility to make the most effective use of limited public funds. He suggested that changing social and demographic patterns, particularly the decline in average family size, might require new forms of housing design. Among the ideas discussed was the possibility of constructing smaller homes capable of being extended later if family circumstances changed. Such proposals reflected broader debates taking place throughout Ireland and Britain during the period concerning flexibility, density, and affordability in public housing design. The housing scheme itself, constructed by W. J. Cronin and Sons Ltd., was presented as another stage in the continuing development of Cork's north-western inner-city suburbs. The Knocknaheeny–Hollyhill area had been planned since the early 1970s as a large integrated suburban community intended to combine municipal/council housing, private development, schools, shops, recreational facilities, and local services within a single planned urban environment. Corporation officials acknowledged that the area had initially attracted criticism for lacking basic amenities during the early phases of development. Residents frequently complained that newly built housing estates were isolated from essential services such as schools, churches, shops, and community facilities. However, city officials argued that such delays were inevitable in the early stages of large suburban developments, as commercial and social infrastructure required a sufficiently large resident population before investment became viable. According to the Lord Mayor, Cork Corporation had attempted to address these concerns by reserving land for essential public and community services from the outset and by working closely with religious authorities, public bodies, and private developers to encourage investment in the area. By the time of the Hollyhill opening ceremony, municipal leaders believed that substantial progress had been made in

transforming what had once been a sparsely developed suburban fringe into a functioning urban community.[64]

In early December 1980, addressing over 200 members and guests of the Cork City branch of the Soroptimist International in the Imperial Hotel, Lord Mayor, Ald. Toddy O'Sullivan said the drift of Cork's population into the suburbs had depleted the number of families living in the city centre to 1,400. Cork Corporation was endeavouring to rejuvenate the inner city by embarking on a housing scheme to provide homes for an added 5,000 people, but he pointed out that costs for such a project were 50 per cent more than building projects in the suburbs. The responsibility of his chain of office was weighing heavily upon him, said Toddy O'Sullivan, especially as unemployment levels in Cork continued to rise with resultant increased violence on the city streets. He remarked that "there is a need that we should build up our own industrial base. We will have to become more self-sufficient to ensure the stability of our work force".[65]

As documented in the '*Evening Echo*,' voluntary and charitable organisations played an increasingly important role in supplementing the work of local authorities in the provision of housing and care for elderly people in Ireland. In Cork city centre, one of the most significant of these organisations was SHARE (Students Harness Aid for the Relief of the Elderly), a charity founded by schoolboys that became widely known for its efforts to provide housing and support for older citizens living in poverty or isolation. In December 1980, the opening of a new housing scheme for elderly residents in Cork City was regarded as both a civic and humanitarian achievement. The development reflected a growing awareness of the difficulties faced by many older people, particularly those living alone in often poor-quality accommodation with limited financial means. Speaking at the occasion, Mgr. Bastible described SHARE as a private

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[64] *Evening Echo 6/6/1980*

[65] *Cork Examiner 8/12/1980*

charitable organisation established to channel public generosity towards meeting a pressing social need. He emphasised that many elderly people in Cork were living in substandard and costly lodgings, often struggling to survive on small incomes and facing loneliness and insecurity in their later years. The SHARE housing developments emerged from a unique collaboration between voluntary effort, public authorities, and wider community support. Central to the organisation's success was the fundraising work carried out annually by Cork schoolboys, whose enthusiasm and public collections generated substantial financial support for the charity's projects. Through these efforts, combined with donations from the citizens of Cork, SHARE was able to finance the construction of modern heated homes specifically designed for elderly residents.

The project also demonstrated the growing cooperation between charitable organisations and public bodies in Irish social housing provision during the period. Cork Corporation contributed the site for the scheme, prepared the land for development, installed essential services, and completed landscaping works. The Southern Health Board assisted with the furnishing costs and provided home-help services for residents requiring additional care and support. Architecturally, the development reflected changing attitudes towards housing for older people. Constructed from concrete blocks, the scheme represented a departure from earlier SHARE housing designs. The organisation regularly reviewed and modified its layouts in response to the experiences and feedback of residents, demonstrating an increasing emphasis on comfort, accessibility, and practical living arrangements for elderly occupants. Particularly notable was the inclusion of specially adapted homes for wheelchair users, illustrating the growing influence of accessible design principles in Irish housing during the period. Bathrooms were fitted to accommodate wheelchair height, while specially designed shower systems and accessible kitchens enabled residents to maintain a greater degree of independence. External ramps and carefully planned interiors further reflected efforts to ensure mobility and ease of movement for elderly residents with physical

disabilities. The development of such schemes highlighted wider transformations in Irish social policy during the late twentieth century. As life expectancy increased and traditional family support structures evolved, there was growing recognition of the need for dedicated housing and care facilities for older people. Organisations such as SHARE helped fill gaps in State provision while also fostering a strong culture of civic participation and local philanthropy in Cork. Their work became an important part of the broader history of social housing and welfare provision in modern urban Ireland.[66]

In February 1981, during the course of a civic inspection tour of Cork City's south side, members and officials of Cork Corporation found themselves drawn into a series of pointed exchanges concerning both the city's housing programme and the proposed line of the Southern Ring Road. The visit took in several developing areas, including housing schemes at Model Farm Road and Curraheen, as well as works in Mahon. While the tour was intended as a general review of progress, it soon became clear that unresolved infrastructural and planning issues would dominate discussion. Particular attention was given to the alignment of the Southern Ring Road. At a subsequent meeting held in Ringmahon House, councillors representing the Togher area argued strongly that the social consequences of the road's proposed route should carry greater weight than the financial implications of altering its course. They maintained that community disruption and long-term social impact justified revisiting the current design. However, this position did not command unanimous support within the wider Council, revealing a divergence of opinion on how best to balance civic development with community preservation. The tour also exposed continuing difficulties in the delivery and occupation of housing in Mahon. Thirty-one houses, completed under the R2 scheme prior to Christmas, remained unoccupied despite their completion. Officials attributed the delay in part to irregular service installations by the Electricity Supply Board, noting that until recently there was

[66] *Evening Echo 9/12/1980*

no meter fitted to the main pumping station serving the development.

Cork's Assistant City Manager, Pat Keenan, placed much of the responsibility for the delay on the E.S.B. He contended that internal difficulties within the Board had contributed to setbacks across several Corporation housing schemes. He expressed particular concern that advance payments had already been made to the E.S.B. - including £50,000 in the case of Mahon - yet essential works had not been completed, leaving the Corporation, in his view, inadequately served. The Electricity Supply Board, however, rejected the implication that responsibility lay solely with them. A spokesperson stated that delays had arisen from a combination of factors involving both parties, and acknowledged that industrial disputes involving lorry drivers had affected operations. In the specific case of the Mahon development, the Board identified ducting works as a primary source of difficulty. The spokesperson further explained that electricity supply to the housing scheme and pumping station had been energised only the previous week, but was subsequently disconnected after a supervisory inspection revealed that trench depths did not meet required safety standards. It was agreed that remedial works would be undertaken, with the intention of re-energising the supply promptly. Despite these setbacks, the Board indicated that once corrected, connections to individual homes could proceed without further delay. Applicants allocated houses in the scheme were advised that, upon submission of the necessary paperwork, their electricity supply could be installed within a matter of days.[67]

As reported by the '*Cork Examiner*,' in June 1981, a significant milestone in Cork's housing development programme was reached with the official opening of a £2 million Cork Corporation scheme on Model Farm Road, performed by the Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor, Alderman Toddy O'Sullivan. The development, comprising 89 houses in its initial phase, formed the first stage of an ambitious wider

[67] *Evening Echo 27/2/1981*

project valued at approximately £5 million. When complete, the scheme would extend to 230 dwellings and incorporate a range of community facilities, including a shopping complex, a library, a bank, and a clinic under the Southern Health Board. It was also part of a broader municipal plan to construct 400 new homes across the city within the year, representing an overall investment of £11 million. The Model Farm Road scheme marked an important moment for the National Building Agency, which had previously been associated with controversy a decade earlier. During its management of a large-scale programme involving 1,800 houses in areas such as Togher, Mayfield, and the Glen, the agency had faced severe criticism, culminating in rent strikes by residents who alleged serious defects, including widespread condensation and related structural problems. Against that background, the new development at Parkway Drive, off the Model Farm Road, was presented as a marked improvement in both design and execution. The houses were described as well planned, carefully insulated, and finished to a high standard, and were considered comparable with adjoining private housing. Each dwelling had an estimated cost of £20,000, and it was acknowledged that substantial Exchequer support would be required to amortise the development costs over a period extending beyond three decades. In policy terms, the scheme was seen as an attempt to combine local authority housing with private housing in a more integrated community setting than had previously been achieved in the city.

In addressing those present, Lord Mayor Toddy O'Sullivan - who was also a newly elected Labour TD - emphasised that the success of the scheme would depend not solely on construction standards but on the development of community life within it. He remarked that while Cork Corporation could provide the physical environment, it would ultimately be the residents themselves who would shape it into a "happy community." He also paid tribute to both the National Building Agency and the City Architect's Department for their roles in the design and supervision of the project, noting that earlier criticisms of the agency should be reconsidered in light of its present performance. In a notable gesture of

reconciliation, he expressed the gratitude of the Council to the agency for its contribution to the development. The ceremony included a blessing of the houses, conducted by Canon Timothy McSweeney of Bishopstown and the Reverend Maurice Carey, Dean of Cork. Construction of the scheme was carried out by Bradley Brothers, who were also contracted to build a further 90 houses in the second phase of the project.[68]

Also during this period, efforts were due to be made to secure the resumption of work on a Cork Corporation housing scheme at Brougemakers' Hill, adjacent to Blarney Street in Cork city, after construction activity had come to an abrupt halt. Work on the site ceased when eleven workers withdrew from the project, bringing progress to a temporary standstill. The stoppage highlighted ongoing difficulties on the development, the precise nature of which had not been fully resolved at the time. In response to the disruption, a meeting was scheduled for the following week between representatives of the Cork Builders' Group and the City Architect, Mr T. F. McNamara. The purpose of the discussions was to address the outstanding issues affecting the site and to seek a basis for the resumption of building work. The meeting was expected to focus on the problems which had led to the workforce withdrawal and on establishing the conditions necessary for construction to continue.[69]

A similar issue arose in August 1981. Efforts were under way to avert lay-offs within a Cork Corporation direct labour unit, following concern over the dismissal of a number of workers engaged on housing construction in Knocknaheeney. The secretary of the Cork Building Group, Mr O'Neill, issued a statement indicating that the Group was due to meet Corporation officials the following morning in an attempt to secure the reinstatement of twelve men who had been laid off. The workers affected comprised five tradesmen and

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[68] *Cork Examiner 17/6/1981*

[69] *Evening Echo 19/6/1981*

seven labourers, all of whom had been employed on a housing scheme in the area. According to a spokesman for Cork Corporation, the decision had been taken on the basis that no further work was available for the men concerned. It was further argued that retaining their employment under such conditions would have placed the viability of the entire direct labour unit at risk, a unit which at that time employed approximately 130 workers. However, the Cork Building Group challenged the manner in which the decision had been reached. Mr O'Neill stated that the lay-offs had been implemented without prior consultation, and he criticised the absence of engagement with the workers' representatives before notices were issued. In response, the Group called for the city Corporation to withdraw the lay-off notices, at least temporarily, pending formal consultation and agreement between the parties. The dispute highlighted continuing tensions over employment arrangements within the Corporation's ongoing housing construction programme and the procedures governing workforce decisions on publicly funded projects.[70]

By January 1982, Cork Corporation had received approval to proceed with the commencement of a number of small-scale housing schemes within the city, following a deputation to the Minister for the Environment, Mr. Peter Barry, in Dublin. The decision came after the Corporation had already accepted tenders for the projects concerned, but had been awaiting formal sanction to begin works. The outcome of the meeting effectively cleared the way for progress on these developments, which formed part of a broader housing strategy for the city. During discussions with the Minister, the Corporation presented an extensive housing programme with an overall estimated cost of £15.8 million. In addition to this capital works plan, it sought further financial provision of £3.2 million to support its house purchase loan scheme for 1982, as well as £100,000 specifically allocated for remedial works on the N.B.A. housing scheme, which had previously been the subject of concern regarding housing conditions and services. In response, the Minister indicated that a final

[70] *Cork Examiner 5/8/1981*

decision on the Corporation's full housing allocation would be communicated within a matter of weeks, suggesting that the funding framework for the coming period was still under active consideration at national level.[71]

It was announced in June 1982 that Cork Corporation and Cork County Council were the recipients of increased housing allocations announced as part of a wider programme of capital expenditure aimed at expanding residential construction in the region. The additional funding, totalling £850,000, formed an upward adjustment to existing housing budgets and reflected continued state investment in urban and regional development. Under the revised allocation, Cork Corporation's housing budget was increased by £500,000, bringing its total provision to £12.5 million. This enhancement supported a series of planned housing developments within the city, including major schemes scheduled to commence in key suburban areas. Among these were a development of 54 houses and another of 51 houses in the Mahon and Blackrock district, alongside a separate 50-house scheme located at Rossa Avenue in Bishopstown. In parallel, Cork County Council's allocation for South Cork was increased by £350,000, raising its total housing provision in that area to £3,050,000. The additional funding was directed towards forthcoming projects intended to address growing demand for local authority housing in expanding commuter and suburban communities. A principal scheme identified under this programme was the construction of 59 houses in Ballincollig, which was due to commence as part of the council's development schedule. The announcement of the increased allocations was made by Mr. Gene Fitzgerald, Minister for Labour and the Public Service, who outlined the adjustments as part of ongoing efforts to support housing supply and infrastructure development in Cork and its surrounding regions.[72]

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[71] *Cork Examiner 14/1/1982*

[72] *Evening Echo 3/6/1982*

# *BREAKING GROUND*

In December 1982, concern mounted over the adequacy of heating provision for elderly residents living in the Northern Builders Association (N.B.A.) housing complexes at the Glen, Mayfield, and Togher. A feasibility study into the existing systems was commissioned by Cork Corporation after issues with the arrangements came to public attention. The matter was brought into sharp focus during an exceptionally severe cold spell, when voluntary social worker Paddy O'Brien raised the alarm through the '*Echo*' "People Page". His intervention highlighted the conditions experienced by more than seventy elderly residents across Ard Erin Way, Comeragh Park, and Errigal Heights in the Glen scheme, many of whom were particularly vulnerable due to age, illness, or limited mobility. The housing units in question, situated on the upper floors of flat complexes, had been fitted the previous year with oil-fired radiators controlled by a central timing system. While intended to provide structured and efficient heating, the system's schedule proved problematic during winter conditions. Heating was programmed to operate in the morning from approximately 8.30 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., and again in the evening between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m., leaving a prolonged unheated period in the middle of the day. It was this gap - typically from early afternoon until evening - that became the focus of concern. Residents, many of whom had no alternative heating sources such as fireplaces or supplementary electric heaters, were left without warmth for several hours at a time. O'Brien described the situation as deeply unsatisfactory, arguing that it was unacceptable for elderly people to endure such conditions in modern housing provision.

During his visits to affected homes, O'Brien observed the extent of the hardship first-hand. He recounted meeting residents who had resorted to going to bed in the late afternoon simply to keep warm, while others attempted to cope by layering heavy clothing indoors. He noted that for many, electric heating was either financially out of reach or considered unsafe, leaving them almost entirely dependent on the central system. The majority of those affected were reported to be between seventy and eighty years of age, with

a significant proportion being housebound. Similar concerns were also identified in other Cork Corporation estates, including Togher and Mayfield, where comparable heating arrangements were in place for elderly tenants. In his appeal, O'Brien urged Cork Corporation to reconsider the scheduling of the heating system, suggesting either extended afternoon operation or improved zoning that would allow more targeted heating for ground-floor elderly residents. At present, the system heated entire blocks simultaneously, with no capacity to isolate specific groups or floors, a limitation he identified as a key structural flaw. Cork Corporation acknowledged the concerns and expressed sympathy for those affected. Senior officials, including Assistant City Manager Pat Keenan, indicated that the matter would be reviewed without delay. While recognising the financial constraints involved in municipal budgeting, the Corporation committed to examining possible adjustments to the system, particularly in light of the ongoing cold weather. It was also indicated that contingency measures might be introduced to ensure continuous heating during periods of extreme cold, including the possibility of extended or uninterrupted operation over the Christmas period, with consideration given to maintaining similar arrangements into January should the harsh conditions persist.[73]

[73] *Evening Echo 8/12/1982*

## £90,000 Housing Scheme

Cork Corporation's housing scheme at Military Road, costing £90,000, was making fast progress until the cement strike. It is due to be completed in June. It includes flats, maisonettes, two-storey houses and one-bedroom cottages.

Known as the "Clankittane" or "Tunnel Field" scheme, it replaces many condemned houses near Collins Barracks.

The "Tunnel Field" is so called because it surrounds one of the four ventilation shafts of the railway tunnel. The above photograph was taken from where the shaft stnds. For generations of Barrackton folk it was a public playground and old-timers will remember that Barrackton A.F.C. once had a clubroom and small dancehall where this photograph was taken.

Main entrances to the new estate will be via O'Riordan's Square (now demolished) off Old Youghal Road, and via Corban's Square, Military Road. The Clankittane Square entrance is now sealed up.

*The city council's social housing scheme at Military Road, then under construction. It cost approximately IR£90,000.*

*(Source: Evening Echo 29/5/1970)*

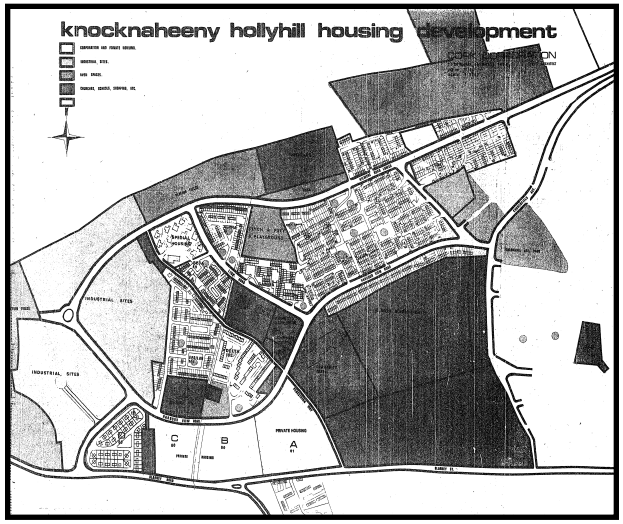
A view of some of the new four-bedroomed Corporation houses at Tramore Road, Cork.

*(Source: Evening Echo 13/4/1973)*

The contract for the Boyces Street Housing Scheme being signed at the City Hall, Cork, yesterday. Front row (left to right): Mr. Aidan O'Shea, The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. Sean French, T.D., Mr. Pat O'Shea (Snr.), Mr. Pat O'Shea (Jnr.). Back row (left to right): Mr. M. J. Richmond, Assistant Town Clerk, Miss N. Murphy, Law Dept., Mr. Tony MacNamara, B.A., M.R.I.A.I., F.R.S.A., City Architect. (Examiner)

*Then-Lord Mayor of Cork (Councillor Sean French TD) oversaw the contract signing of the city council's Boyce's St. Housing Scheme.*

*(Source: Cork Examiner 11/12/1976)*




*A map produced by Cork Corporation showing a new housing development plan in Hollyhill, Knocknaheeny.*

*(Source: Evening Echo 4/4/1979)*

The new N.B.A. housing scheme at Curraheen.

**New Scheme Tenants Not Paying Rent**

*In 1979, the city Corporation faced the issue of new tenants at the NBA scheme in Curraheen not paying rents.*

*(Source: Evening Echo 28/8/1979)*

*The in-fill housing scheme at William O'Brien Street*

# Good Examples Of Better Housing

*By DENIS READING*

*Local Government Correspondent*

A TOTAL of 681 local authority houses are under construction in Cork City at the present time and the Corporation has accepted a tender for the building of another 90 at Rossa Avenue.

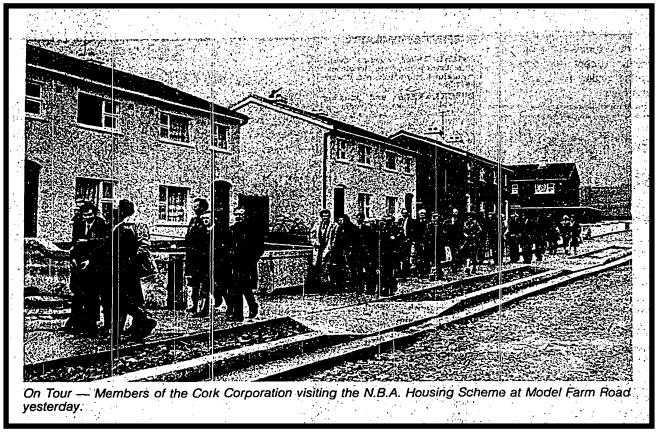
*(Source: Evening Echo 23/5/1980)*

*Lord Mayor Mr. Jim Corr unveiling the plaque to officially open the new Cork Corporation Coolmaine Crescent/Kilkieran Close housing scheme, Hollyhill, today. Included also are Very Rev. Canon Denis O'Connor, Adm.; Mr. T. J. McHugh, City Manager; Mr. Tony McNamara, City Architect; Cllr. Dan Morrissey, Chairman, and members of Housing Committee.*

**Rethink Needed On Housing**

*(Source: Evening Echo 6/6/1980)*

# *BREAKING GROUND*



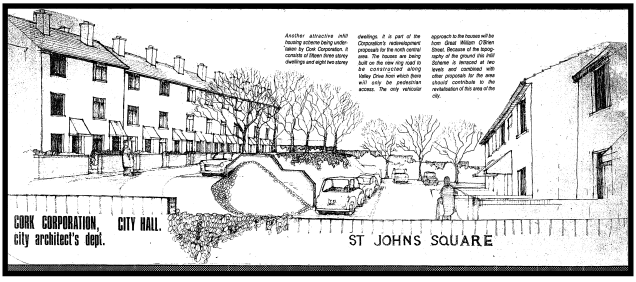
*On Tour — Members of the Cork Corporation visiting the N.B.A. Housing Scheme at Model Farm Road yesterday.*

*(Source: Evening Echo 27/2/1981)*

# *BREAKING GROUND*

*Members of the Cork Corporation pictured at the N.B.A. Housing Scheme (Bradleys) at Model Farm Road yesterday.*

*(Source: Evening Echo 27/2/1981)*




*(Source: Evening Echo 26/3/1981)*

*A May 1981 episode of the 'Today Tonight' current affairs programme on RTÉ provided a grim assessment of the housing situation in the city at the turn of the 1980s.*

*(Source: RTÉ Archives)*

*An episode of 'Ireland's Eye' from March 1982 documented a housing development in Mahon which fused local authority and private units in one area.*

*(Source: RTÉ Archives)*

## CONCLUSION

By the close of 1982, when this manuscript ends its account, Cork City had been fundamentally reshaped by a quarter-century of housing construction, demolition, and renewal. The physical transformation was unmistakable. Where once the inner city had been a labyrinth of tenement slums, narrow lanes, and decaying Georgian townhouses, whole districts now stood cleared or redeveloped. On the suburban fringe, vast new estates stretched across what had been farmland, market gardens, and undeveloped hillsides just a generation before. Thousands of families who had been doubled up in single rooms or living in condemned properties now had roofs over their heads, bathrooms of their own, and gardens where children could play. Measured by the sheer number of dwellings built - with thousands of new local authority homes between the late 1950s and the early 1980s - the housing programme had achieved something remarkable. The City of Cork had not simply kept pace with population growth; it had, for a time at least, seemed to be winning the battle against overcrowding and slum conditions.

And yet, as this exploration makes abundantly clear, the story was never as straightforward as the statistics suggested. The houses that rose on the edges of the city were not always the homes that tenants had hoped for. The National Building Agency estates at Togher, Mayfield, and the Glen became bywords sub-standard structures, with condensation running down walls, heating systems that could not keep the cold at bay, and repairs that seemed to take forever. The relocation of working-class families from close-knit inner-city communities to sprawling suburban schemes, whatever its benefits in terms of space and sanitation, often came at a social cost that planners had failed to anticipate. Isolation, boredom, a lack of amenities, and the expense of transport to work and shops became familiar complaints. For some, the new estates felt less like liberation and more like exile. The very word "housing" began to carry uncomfortable overtones: housing estates, housing lists, housing officers, housing problems. What was meant to be a solution had, in some respects, become another layer of the problem.

This manuscript also reveals the persistent fragility of the housing programme's financial foundations. From the late 1950s onward, every surge in construction was shadowed by a crisis of funding. The Corporation's dependence on central government loans, the Local Loans Fund, and the goodwill of successive ministers meant that housing output was perpetually vulnerable to shifts in national economic policy. The credit squeezes of the 1960s, the inflation of the 1970s, and the rising interest rates that accompanied both decades repeatedly threatened to derail projects at every stage. City managers and councillors spent as much time pleading for money in Dublin as they did overseeing building sites in Cork. The burden fell, ultimately, on tenants and ratepayers. Rents rose, sometimes sharply; rates increased, particularly for local businesses and better-off households; and the gap between the cost of building and the income from tenancies widened year by year. The differential rent system, intended to ensure that no family paid more than it could afford, instead became a source of perennial dispute, with tenants arguing that assessments were unfair and the Corporation arguing that arrears were unsustainable. The rent strike of 1971, which dragged on for months and threatened to spread across the entire city, was only the most dramatic of many confrontations over who should pay for the housing revolution.

And what of the people who lived through these changes? The manuscript cannot offer a comprehensive social history - that would require different sources, different methods, and a different kind of book. But the fragments that survive in the newspaper reports and council minutes are suggestive. There is the young woman in the leaking caravan at Sun Valley Drive, surrounded by her five small children, insisting that she was "not different" from settled families, that all she wanted was a dry floor and a chance to send her children to school. There is Nellie Ballard, eighty-two years old, standing in her new SHARE home at Rope Walk and declaring it the happiest day of her life. There are the elderly residents of the Glen estates, going to bed in the late afternoon because the central heating had been switched off

and they had no way to keep warm. There are the families in Togher who heard rats moving through the ceilings at night, who paid for communal heating that barely worked, who wrote letters, attended meetings, and sometimes went on strike because no one seemed to be listening. These voices, however incompletely captured, remind us that housing policy was never just about bricks and mortar. It was about dignity, security, and the basic human need for a place to call one's own.

The manuscript also illuminates the shifting boundaries of civic responsibility during these decades. At the outset of the period, the dominant assumption was that the Corporation built houses and tenants paid rent - a straightforward transactional relationship. By the end, that assumption had been complicated in multiple directions. The tenant purchase scheme, launched in 1971, blurred the line between renter and owner, offering working-class families a path to homeownership that had previously been available only to the better-off. The involvement of the National Building Agency introduced a new layer of institutional complexity, with responsibility for design, construction, and defects distributed uneasily between local and national bodies. The emergence of key voluntary organisations like SHARE demonstrated that the state could not, and perhaps should not always, be the sole provider of housing for the most vulnerable. And the growing assertiveness of tenant groups, whether through rent strikes, protest meetings, or individual appeals, suggested that the old deference to officialdom was breaking down. Tenants were no longer passive recipients of policy; they were becoming actors in their own right, demanding not just shelter but quality, accountability, and respect.

The manuscript ends in 1982, but the story it tells has no neat conclusion. The housing problem did not disappear, nor was it ever going to. By the early 1980s, the waiting list in Cork still ran to thousands of families. New problems had emerged: vandalism, anti-social behaviour, the difficulty of maintaining ageing estates with shrinking budgets. The optimism of the 1960s, when city managers and ministers

had spoken of clearing slums within a generation, had given way to a more chastened mood. Yet something had been achieved. The worst of the old tenements were gone. Overcrowding, though still present, had been significantly reduced. Standards of space, sanitation, and amenity that would have seemed utopian in the 1950s had become the baseline expectation. And Cork City, for all its ongoing difficulties, was a healthier, safer, and more decent place to live than it had been when Richard Valentine Jago presided over the Corporation in 1958.

What lessons does this history offer? Perhaps the most obvious is that housing is never just about housing. It is about employment, transport, education, healthcare, and the whole fabric of urban life. The estates that worked best were those that integrated homes with shops, schools, clinics, and workplaces. The schemes that failed were those that dumped families on windswept peripheries and left them to fend for themselves. Another lesson concerns the limits of centralisation. The constant back-and-forth between Cork and Dublin, the delays in approving loans and schemes, the frustration of local officials who knew their own city better than any minister could - all of this suggests that Irish housing policy would have benefited from greater local autonomy and flexibility. A third lesson, uncomfortable but unavoidable, is that good intentions are not enough. The architects and planners who designed the system-built estates believed they were creating a better future. The tenants who lived in them often experienced something closer to a nightmare. Bridging that gap between aspiration and reality requires not just expertise but humility, accountability, and a willingness to listen to the people who actually have to live with the consequences.

Perhaps most of all, the manuscript reminds us that housing is a moral question. It is about whether a society believes that everyone, regardless of income, deserves a warm, dry, secure place to live. The Cork of 1958 had not answered that question; the Cork of 1982 had not fully answered it either. But the decades in between saw a genuine, if imperfect, attempt to move towards an answer. The officials who

planned the estates, the councillors who argued over budgets, the workers who laid the bricks and poured the concrete, the tenants who paid their rents and tended their gardens and sometimes rose up in protest - all of them, in their different ways, contributed to that attempt. Their efforts did not solve the housing problem once and for all. No single generation can do that. But they made things better than they found them. And that, in the end, may be the most that any generation can hope to achieve.

The manuscript closes with a scene from December 1982: elderly residents in the Glen shivering through cold afternoons because their heating system had been designed without any understanding of their needs. It is a bleak image, but it is not the only image. Elsewhere in the city, families were sitting down to their dinners in warm kitchens, children were doing their homework in bedrooms of their own, and elderly couples were growing old in homes that were small but dry and safe. The housing programme had not failed, but neither had it fully succeeded. It had done what large, complex, human endeavours always do: it had produced a mixed inheritance, some of it proud and admirable, some of it disappointing and even shameful. The task of sorting that inheritance, of building on what worked and fixing what did not, would fall to the next generation. And the generation after that. For housing, like cities themselves, is never finished. It is always becoming. That is at once the frustration and the promise of the story this manuscript has told.